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Unpacking interest groups: on the intermediary role of interest groups and its effects for their political relevance

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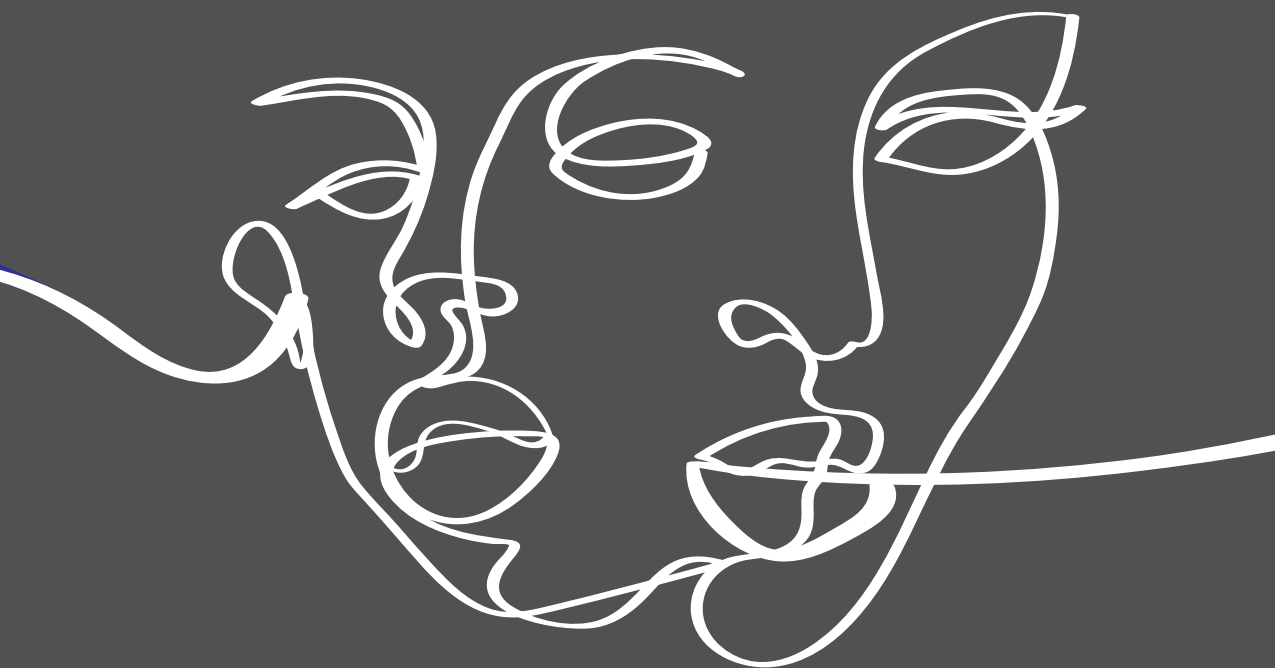
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Unpacking Interest Groups

On the intermediary role of interest groups
and its effects for their political relevance



Adrià Albareda Sanz

Unpacking Interest Groups

**On the intermediary role of interest groups and
its effects for their political relevance**

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Chapter I

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

The presence and participation of interest groups in policymaking processes has become a crucial component of Western democracies. Increasingly interdependent and complex policy environments have positioned interest groups linking society and policymakers as one of the key policy actors when formulating, adopting, and implementing public policies (Dahl, 1961; Jordan & Maloney, 1997a; Lowery & Gray, 2004; Truman, 1951). Defined as membership-based, formal organizations, that aim to shape public policy in a specific direction on behalf of the interests of their constituency/membership in the political arena (Jordan, Halpin, & Maloney, 2004), interest groups are often described as transmission belts that collect, aggregate and transfer policy input from their members to policymaking processes (Easton, 1971). As such, they fulfil an intermediary function by ‘feeding members’ preferences into the policy process’ (Kohler-Koch, 2010, p. 107), thus legitimizing and informing public officials’ policymaking choices.

This transmission belt function displayed by interest groups is often taken for granted by scholars and practitioners, but rarely conceptualized and empirically examined. As an illustration of the relevance of the transmission belt ideal in political-administrative reality: several public officials of the European Commission interviewed for this research project noted that interest groups are particularly relevant in order to know what different sectors of society think about policy proposals. More specifically, when justifying the interaction with different interest groups, one senior public official in charge of drafting a major regulation in the EU health domain highlighted that “the members of [interest group A] are the ones that conduct clinical trials in Europe, and we need to know about the impact of this regulation on their members. (...) We also talked with [interest group B] because clinical trials are conducted on patients, so it is important to have them informed and on board”. This quote illustrates how public officials frequently listen to interest groups while assuming that they represent the preferences of their members, and therefore an agreement with the spokesperson of a group is taken as an agreement with the whole membership-base of that group. However, interest groups usually struggle to function as transmission belts. Paraphrasing a representative of “interest group A” mentioned by the senior public official: “Reconciling different members’ perspectives is sometimes a challenge. We try to provide a channel so our members can have a say in policymaking, but not all our members are always happy”. The respondent also notes that internal disagreements are often solved by dropping policy issues from the agenda or by communicating partial positions that do not reflect the preferences of all the members in the group. Even when there is internal consensus among members, efficiently communicating policy positions to public officials is not an easy endeavor. As mentioned by the spokesperson of “interest group B” involved in the same regulation: “We always have a capacity problem, it has to do with resources, when you don’t have a lot of staff, and basically one person has to do everything, then it

is difficult to be politically active”. These examples illustrate that while governments and public officials often interact with interest groups because of their representative function and their ability to connect their members and constituency to policymaking processes, these groups not always possess the instruments to function as a transmission belt, as this requires time, resources, and adequate organizational structures.

Addressing this puzzle is crucial to improve our assessments of the quality of our democratic systems and the role that interest groups play in them. In other words, it is crucial to unveil whether ‘those claiming to act on behalf of members in the pressure system are in fact representing their interests’ (Barakso & Schaffner, 2008, p. 187; Schattschneider, 1935). It is important to move beyond general assumptions about the intermediary role of groups and more specifically evaluate the mechanisms and processes that interest groups have in place to ‘ensure that they accurately reflect the opinions and preferences of their constituency’ (Halpin & Fraussen, 2017b, p. 24). By doing so, it is possible to more accurately assess whether interest group representatives are legitimate spokespersons for their members in public policy processes. In other words, we need to study how interest groups are internally organized to better understand their varying involvement in policymaking process and their democratic contribution to public governance.

Considering the potential effects on the democratic and legitimizing role of interest groups in our governance systems, there is surprisingly scant research into how and why groups organize their intermediary function and the consequences thereof for their political relevance (i.e., access, influence or success in policymaking processes). The literature often relies on overly general classifications of groups (e.g., business groups vs. citizen groups) that are not necessarily related to their intermediary function (for a discussion, see Fraussen, 2020). Other studies have more directly contributed to the assessment of interest groups’ transmissive function through case studies that focus on the internal representation mechanisms of either citizen groups or business associations. However, we lack systematic research that specifically examines the intermediary role of different types of interest groups by linking the ability of groups to involve their members to their capacity to access and influence policymaking processes.

In order to examine this important normative and empirical gap, this dissertation puts forward two premises: we need to better understand the transmissive role of interest groups and, to do so, we need to unpack how they are internally organized. The transmissive function is defined here as the organizational ability of groups to collect, aggregate and transfer the preferences of their membership-base to policymaking processes. As such, the conceptualization of transmission belts is based on two distinct yet complementary dimensions that need to be balanced and reconciled to achieve the intermediary function: one that centers on the ability to involve and engage with the members (i.e., member involvement), and the other focused on the organizational capacities to generate expert-based information and efficiently transfer policy input to policymakers (i.e., organizational capacity).

Both dimensions are equally relevant to function as a transmission belt. However, not all groups are equally capable (nor willing) to go through the time-consuming and costly process of aggregating and synthesizing the preferences of their members and broad constituencies to ensure representation (Jordan & Maloney, 1997b; Kröger, 2018). Nor do they have the necessary organizational capacities to professionally and efficiently communicate policy positions to policymakers (Klüver & Saurugger, 2013). Hence, interest groups vary in the extent to which they invest in member involvement for representation and in organizational capacity to efficiently interact with public officials. What is more, groups often face tensions and trade-offs as it is not always easy (nor cheap) to actively involve the members to ensure representation while efficiently interacting with public officials in need of quality and timely policy input (Berkhout, 2013; Berkhout, Hanegraaff, & Braun, 2017; Schmitter & Streeck, 1999). Groups that want to be politically active and relevant in policymaking processes are often asked to provide expert-based policy input on a very short notice. These policymakers' demands contrast with the involvement of the membership-base when setting policy positions, a process that takes time and often requires an effort from the leadership of the organization to reconcile conflicting perspectives and reach common positions.

Despite these hurdles, groups that reconcile the two organizational dynamics and effectively function as transmission belts have great potential to contribute to policymaking processes with a wider range of policy capacities. Defined as 'the set of skills and resources—or competences and capabilities—necessary to perform policy functions' (Wu, Ramesh, & Howlett, 2015), policy capacities such as expert knowledge or the political preferences of key constituencies on a particular policy are crucial to become politically relevant among policymakers. More generally, interest groups that function as transmission belts can contribute with both input and output legitimacy (Kröger, 2018) as they make sure that the policy input provided to public officials has the approval of the membership-base and is grounded on expert-based knowledge. These characteristics of their policy advice facilitate the development of technically sound and implementable legislations.

In summary, functioning as a transmission belt that effectively aggregates and involves the membership-base and interacts with policymakers is not a straightforward endeavor. Still, it is highly relevant to assess the contribution of groups to our democratic systems. As noted, public officials need and require representative information that is efficiently supplied by interest groups. Yet, interest groups struggle to involve their members while efficiently communicating their policy input to public officials, as both functions demand an investment in organizational structures and processes that not all groups can (or want) to possess. In light of this conundrum, and in order to advance our understanding of the intermediary role of interest groups, this dissertation unpacks interest groups and analyzes how and when do interest groups reconcile the two organizational components of the

transmission belt ideal, and the broader implications of these organizational practices for the involvement and role of groups in policymaking processes.

1.1 What do we know about transmission belts, and what is missing?

Interest group scholars have paid limited attention to how and when groups fulfil their intermediary role and function as transmission belts. Relatedly, there is scant research exploring the implications of interest groups' intermediary function for their relations with public officials. The extensive literature examining interest groups' roles and activities in political systems often relies on broad typologies more related to the type of constituency or 'interests' they represent than to their ability to relay their members to policymaking processes.

Previous typologies of interest groups – often focused on the distinction between business and citizen groups¹ – have been empirically and normatively helpful to evaluate interest group systems (Gray & Lowery, 1996; Hanegraaff & Berkhout, 2018), as well as the ability of groups to supply information to policymakers (De Bruycker, 2016; Flöthe, 2019a, 2020), their lobbying activities and strategies (Dür & Mateo, 2013), and their level of access, success, preference attainment, or influence in policymaking processes (Bouwen, 2004; Braun, 2012; Dür, Bernhagen, & Marshall, 2015). However, the majority of the typologies used black box how groups are internally organized, which is crucial to properly assess how they connect their members to policymakers and thus to evaluate interest groups' potential contribution to governance and democratic systems. Importantly, previous research has demonstrated that the assumption that interest group type is related to having certain organizational resources and policy capacities does not always hold true (Baroni, Carroll, Chalmers, Marquez, & Rasmussen, 2014; Binderkrantz, 2009; Klüver, 2012b; Klüver & Saurugger, 2013; Minkoff, Aisenbrey, & Agnone, 2008). Groups within the same category (e.g., citizen groups) may have unequal capacities and adopt different strategies due to their varying organizational formats (Beyers, 2008; Braun, 2015; Halpin, 2014). Therefore, interest groups within the same typology may have unequal organizational abilities to operate as transmission belts.

Despite this observation, much research explaining why some groups are more capable to involve their members and function as transmission belts focuses on either business or citizen groups. For instance, Greenwood (2007, p. 349) underlines that business groups, particularly those representing small or specialized constituencies, are subject to significant membership control, or at least, a particularly powerful segment of members. In contrast, research examining citizen groups mobilized at the national and European Union (EU) level often shows that the organizational structures to ensure member involvement and participation, such as the existence of internal decision-making allowing supporters' input into the organization's strategy, are 'conspicuous by their absence'. As a consequence, citizen groups are characterized for having elitist governance structures that

prioritize efficient interactions with public officials over the involvement and participation of members (Jordan & Maloney, 1997b; Kohler-Koch & Buth, 2013; Sudbery, 2003; Warleigh, 2003, p. 118). This is aligned with the professionalization trend among interest groups, which according to Deth and Maloney (2012, p. 2), entails the specialization and professionalization of voluntary organizations, who ‘change their view on membership and give less priority to organizational democracy’ (see also, Holyoke, 2013; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2012; Skocpol, 2003).

The distinct ability of business and citizen groups to function as transmission belts has been further examined through studies that analyze both types of groups together. Kröger (2016, 2018), for instance, shows how economic groups (in her case EU umbrella groups representing the agricultural sector) had more regular contacts with their members than environmental and anti-poverty organizations. Similarly, Barakso and Schaffner (2008, p. 186) examine the extent to which members are connected to the interest groups they belong to and find that groups from which exit is more costly (i.e., business associations) are ‘structured more democratically than those in which members face fewer barriers to exit’ (i.e., citizen groups). However, other large-*n* studies conclude that group type cannot explain the professionalization (Klüver & Saurugger, 2013) nor the extent to which members are internally involved in interest groups (Binderkrantz, 2009). What is more, relying on in-depth qualitative interviews with the representatives of EU associations, Rodekamp (2014) shows that interest group leaders representing either economic or citizen interests are tightly connected to their organizational members (Rodekamp, 2014). In other words, the results thus far are somewhat inconsistent particularly when linking group type to their democratic and professionalized character. Consequently, it is not possible to definitively state that business groups are more representative or more professionalized than citizen groups.

In summary, most of the research focusing on the internal structures of groups and its relation with their ability to function as transmission belts is based on case studies that either focus on citizen or business organization and are, thus, hard to generalize. Large-*n* studies, in contrast, have analyzed how different types of groups involve their members and develop professionalized structures. Yet, we lack studies that go beyond group typology and link interest groups’ organizational structure to the transmission belt function by simultaneously considering the ability of groups to balance and reconcile member involvement and organizational capacity, two crucial components of the transmission belt ideal. In doing so, it is possible to more directly assess the representative potential of groups and hence their democratic contribution to our governance systems.

Research is also scarce when focusing on the link between the intermediary role of interest groups and their political relevance. In that regard, the majority of the research has examined interest groups’ political relevance by considering group type (Binderkrantz, Christiansen, & Pedersen, 2014; Dür et al., 2015; Hopkins, Klüver, & Pickup, 2019;

Yackee & Yackee, 2006), and the sort of information interest groups supply (Bernhagen, Dür, & Marshall, 2015; Flöthe, 2019a; Tallberg, Dellmuth, Agné, & Duit, 2018). These studies often emphasize two types of policy capacities (or access goods) interest groups can supply to policymakers: policy expertise, related to the ability of groups to provide technical information to develop sound and effective public policies; and political information related to the capacity of groups to confer political legitimacy to policy choices by transferring the ‘needs and interests’ of their members and constituency (Bouwen, 2002, 2004; Braun, 2012; Daugbjerg, Fraussen, & Halpin, 2018; De Bruycker, 2016; Flöthe, 2019a; Truman, 1951). Whereas business (and sectional) groups are frequently seen as possessing policy expertise, citizen (and cause) groups are more likely to have political information (Coen & Katsaitis, 2013; Eising, 2007b; Yackee & Yackee, 2006). However, these studies rely on the assumption that groups within the same typology have similar resources and policy capacities. Instead, this dissertation argues that to further assess interest groups’ political relevance among public officials it is necessary to examine their organizational ability to function as a transmission belt which ultimately affects the policy capacities and information they possess and offer to policymakers.

In that regard, it is important to highlight several recent contributions that examine how different organizational attributes and structures of interest groups affect their political relevance among public officials. Klüver (2012a), for instance, demonstrates that the possession of certain organizational features (functional differentiation, professionalization, and decentralization) positively affects the amount of information interest groups supply to European Commission officials. Another investigation shows how the representativeness and the organizational structure of European associations are significantly related to the (degree of) access to administrative and political officials of the European Commission (Albareda & Braun, 2019). Grömping and Halpin (2019) examine how the internal configuration of groups affect their level of access to members of the parliament in Australia and find that groups with traditional structures to involve their members have higher degrees of access to the parliamentary arena. Last, Heylen et al. (2020), also observe how interest groups with organizational structures aimed at involving their members have a higher likelihood of being political insiders in different European countries. All these authors empirically show the importance of paying attention to how groups are organized internally when assessing their political relevance (for a review, see Halpin, 2014). However, these studies do not make the specific link between the internal organization of groups and how they fulfill their intermediary role in a democratic society. In other words, we still lack studies that link access and influence in policymaking processes to the intermediary role that groups are supposed to play. Hence, there has been little conceptual work on the possible relationship between interest groups’ organizational structure, their capacity to function as transmission belts, and the level of access or influence to policymaking processes. To examine this, we need research that specifically examines how involving the

members and investing in efficient and professionalized structures affects the political relevance of groups. In addition to filling a gap in the literature, this research endeavor could contribute to the normative debate about the desirability of interest groups' involvement in policymaking processes. More specifically, it can be argued that those groups that do not invest in involving their members are less likely to provide representative and democratically valuable policy input to policymakers.

In conclusion, previous research has provided many relevant insights on the role and value of interest groups in democratic systems. However, as argued in the next sections, a proper understanding of the transmission belt function is still lacking as previous research rarely acknowledges the organizational dimension and its link to the intermediary function of interest groups. As a consequence, the literature still misses systematic research on how interest groups reconcile and balance the different components of the transmission belt function.

1.2 Conceptualizing transmission belts: Member involvement and organizational capacity

To better understand the democratic contribution of interest groups to governance systems, it is necessary to go beyond previous categorizations and unpack how groups are internally organized in order to fulfil their assumed intermediary function. To assess the transmissive role of groups, this dissertation relies on and builds upon Schmitter and Streeck seminal investigation on the organization of business associations (Schmitter & Streeck, 1999). The authors present a theoretical framework to study business associations by focusing on two logics: the logic of membership and the logic of influence. Business associations have an intermediary role between two independently constituted, resourceful, and strategically active sets of actors: firms (i.e., members) and the government (i.e., public officials and policymakers). Consequently, as succinctly posed by Schmitter and Streeck (1999, 19), interest groups have to, on the one hand, 'structure themselves and act so as to offer sufficient incentives to their members to extract from them adequate resources to ensure their survival, if not growth. On the other hand, they must be organized in such a way as to offer sufficient incentives to enable them to gain access to and to exercise adequate influence over public authorities.'

Importantly, the authors also highlight that interest organizations face two additional imperatives: the logic of goal formation and the logic of implementation. Even though the authors conceptually distinguish the logics of influence and membership from the logics of implementation and logic of goal formulation, they also acknowledge that they correspond to certain extent (Schmitter & Streeck, 1999, pp. 19–20). More specifically, the logic of goal formation corresponds more closely to the logic of membership as it relates to the establishment of multiple communication mechanisms to facilitate interchange of opinion among members and ensure that decision-making is based on consensus and takes

into account all the opinions expressed through ‘widespread membership involvement’ (Berkhout, 2013; Child, Loveridge, & Warner, 1973; Schmitter & Streeck, 1999). In contrast, the logic of implementation relates to the one of influence as it is concerned with issues of administrative rationality, routinization of operation, specialization of functions, directness of communication and speed in decision-making (Schmitter & Streeck, 1999, p. 19). As noted by Berkhout (2013), this logic relates to the efficient operation of the organizations by relying on professional management and using task specialization.

Drawing on the work of Schmitter and Streeck, this dissertation conceptualizes transmission belts as those interest groups that invest in member involvement for representation (related to the logics of membership and goal formation) and in organizational capacity to efficiently interact with policymakers (related to the logics of influence and implementation). In doing so, the dissertation examines how groups balance both organizational dimensions, under which circumstances are groups more able to do so, and the consequences for the political relevance of groups in policymaking processes.

Member involvement is about the organizational attributes that facilitate the involvement, participation, and engagement with the full range of members, and relates to the idea of representation. Aligned with Kroger (2018, p. 773) representation is understood as a ‘principal – agent relationship (...) *where* there first needs to be a constituency in order for it to be represented: “no object of representation, no representation at all” (Rehfeld, 2011, p. 637).’ Here, the object of representation are ‘members’², which can be individuals, firms, institutions, and membership-groups or other associations that come together to protect and advance certain policy preferences and interests. Interest groups put in place different organizational attributes to facilitate an active involvement of the members and constituencies in the development of policy positions (Kröger, 2014, p. 148). As noted by Dunleavy, ‘no group leader can publicly represent members’ interests without regular and open procedures for gauging their views’ (1991, p. 20). That means that interest groups need formal and informal organizational attributes to make sure that their members can participate and engage in decision-making processes. To ensure this type of representation, members should, at least, have ‘the opportunity to consent to or reject specific propositions and positions’ (Kröger 2014, 149, see also Grant, 2004, 2005). This understanding of representation through member involvement and participation is aligned with democratic theories that conceive democracy as ‘any set of arrangements that instantiates the principle that all affected by collective decisions should have an opportunity to influence the outcome (Dahl, 1998; Habermas, 1996)’ (Urbinati & Warren, 2008, p. 395).

Organizational capacity relates to the ability of groups to efficiently interact with public officials in need of policy input. Gaining access and influence is crucial for interest groups’ maintenance and growth (Schmitter and Streeck 1999). Often, the *raison d’être* of these organizations is to protect the shared interests and concerns of their members vis-à-vis

policymakers. To protect such interests, interest groups' representatives need to interact with public officials, a task that requires certain organizational structures and policy capacities. As noted by Buth (2012, p. 83), 'groups have to be effective to be considered legitimate in the eyes of political decision-makers (...) *and* in order to become more effective, groups adapt their organizational structures and decision-making'. Aligned with Maloney's conceptualization of professionalization, investing in organizational capacity implies that groups are 'structured according to hierarchical business principles aimed at maximizing operational efficiency and pursuing a scientific and technocratic approach to all organizational activities and functions' (Maloney, 2015, p. 102). In that regard, professionalized interest groups represent an organizational shift from membership to management (Skocpol, 2003).

The distinction between the logic of membership and the logic of influence represents a stepping stone to study interest groups as intermediary actors that have the dual function of aggregating and transferring member preferences to policymakers. These two dimensions may be conflicting and result in tensions and trade-offs that interest groups have to reconcile (Berkhout, 2013; Berkhout et al., 2017; van der Pijl & Sminia, 2004). As already noted, involving members is a time-consuming endeavor that may hamper the ability to supply relevant policy input to policymakers pressured by time and resources. However, Schmitter and Streeck also underline that to be viable and "free" interest groups must have organizational properties for dealing to some degree with the different logics presented: 'the selection of a strategy for developing and preserving [interest groups] is likely to involve some compromised mixture of these different logics' (1999, p. 23). That is, despite the tensions and trade-offs, interest groups can benefit from investing in the different organizational dimensions. In that regard, it is important to examine how the two organizational dimensions interact and to what extent are interest groups capable of reconciling and balancing member involvement and organizational capacity, two components that define the Janus-faced nature of the transmission belt ideal.

1.3 Research aims and approach

This dissertation seeks to improve our understanding of the intermediary role that groups play in our governance systems. To do so, the dissertation argues that an assessment of the transmission belt function of groups and their political relevance requires a focus on their internal organizational structure as this relates to their ability to relay members with policymakers. Importantly, the organizational ability to function as a transmission belt relates to the possession of different policy capacities and this ultimately affects the political relevance of groups in policymaking processes.

This dissertation examines how and when interest groups organize themselves as transmission belts and the implications for their political relevance among public officials involved decision-making processes. More specifically, the first block of the dissertation

conceptualizes interest groups as transmission belts and empirically examines when are groups more likely to have the organizational attributes that fit the transmission belt ideal. The second block focuses on the political consequences of being organized as a transmission belt and of having certain political capacities related to it. Table 1.1 below presents the two-fold research question that guide this dissertation as well as the sub-questions that are addressed in each of the four empirical chapters.

Table 1.1. Research questions

<i>How and when do interest groups organize themselves as transmission belts?</i>
Chapter II: How do interest groups organize themselves as transmission belts?
Chapter III: How and under which circumstances do interest groups involve their members in establishing policy positions?
<i>How does the transmissive role and interest groups' policy capacities affect their political relevance?</i>
Chapter IV: How does member involvement and organizational capacity affect the degree of access to public officials?
Chapter V: Why and when are interest groups perceived as more influential among public officials?

The first block of the dissertation focuses on the organizational structure of groups and provides insight into why and when groups are more likely to function as transmission belts. Similarly to other collaborative endeavors, interest groups struggle to successfully reconcile diverging perspectives, preferences, and perceptions of members. To ensure that a collaboration enhances member involvement as well as an efficient interaction with policymakers, groups need supportive organizational structures. As succinctly posed by Schmitter and Streeck (1999, p. 45), ‘the formal organizational properties of interest associations can be conceived as a behavioral expression of how respective associations perceive and interpret the collective interest of their constituents.’ Yet, as noted by the same authors, formal organizational properties do not explain every single aspect of the behavior of interest groups. In fact, many decisions are affected by informal processes that are, nonetheless, confined by the basic framework of formally established structures and exchange relations. In that regard, the dissertation pays attention to both formal as well as informal organizational-level attributes and processes to properly unveil how groups organize themselves and their ability to relay their members to policymakers (Alchian, 1950; Chandler, 1962; Cyert & March, 1963; March & Simon, 1958; Simon, 1997; Williamson, 1991).

More specifically, to explore how and when are interest groups organized as transmission belts, this dissertation examines formal organizational attributes of interest groups as well as the internal dynamics that shape their ability to involve and represent their members. The study puts forward a new typology of groups based on their ability to reconcile the two dimensions related to the transmission belt ideal: member involvement and organizational capacity. Subsequently, informal organizational processes and the role of interest groups leaders are brought into the analysis to explore how internal dynamics and collec-

tive action problems faced by interest groups affect their transmission belt role (Fisker, 2015; Rothenberg, 1988). In that regard, this dissertation explores the intermediary role of groups while paying attention to how leaders deal with a heterogenous membership-base (Berkhout, 2013; Beyers, 2008, p. 1201; De Bruycker, Berkhout, & Hanegraaff, 2019). Moreover, it accounts for the contextualized nature of interest groups' activity, and examines how the nature of policy issues affect member involvement in the process of establishing policy positions, and thus the intermediary function of groups (Klüver, Braun, & Beyers, 2015; Smith, 2000).

The second block of the dissertation examines how functioning as a transmission belt affects the political relevance of interest groups. To do so, it mostly relies on the exchange approach theory and the idea that public officials and interest groups have an interdependent relationship. More specifically, public officials pressured by time and with limited resources, need policy capacities to formulate, pass, and implement feasible and effective policies; interest groups, in turn, seek access to public officials to protect and/or advance their interests in policymaking processes (Beyers, 2002; Bouwen, 2004; Braun, 2012; Daugbjerg et al., 2018; Dür & Mateo, 2013; Eising, 2007b; Flöthe, 2019a; Hall & Deardorff, 2006; Junk, 2019a).

The internal organizational structure of interest groups and their ability to function as transmission belts is directly linked to the policy capacities they possess, which ultimately affects the political relevance of groups in policymaking processes. As noted by Halpin (2014) 'the organizational design of a group is inherently connected to its ability to provide particular policy goods' (see also, Daugbjerg et al., 2018). On a similar note, Levesque and Murray (2012, p. 333), highlight that 'whether capacities are indeed developed is contingent on the extent to which they fit the organizational logic of the group itself'. In that regard, interest groups investing in member involvement are more likely to have certain policy capacities such as social legitimacy, political support, and the ability to mobilize their members and constituency. Investing in organizational capacity, in contrast, is expected to link with analytical capacities, such as the generation of expert knowledge, as well as with the ability to efficiently supply policy input to public officials.

To fully assess this exchange relationship this dissertation goes beyond interest groups' organizational structure and policy capacities and considers public officials' needs and behaviors as they are the ones granting access and influential roles to interest groups. That is, to examine the intermediary role of interest groups, it is also necessary to look at the receiving end of the transmission chain and examine why do public officials value some interest groups more than others. The dissertation makes an important contribution to the literature by complementing exchange theories with behavioral decision theory (Simon, 1997). More specifically, in addition to examine interest groups' political relevance by considering the policy capacities that interest groups can offer thanks to their organizational ability to function as a transmission belt, the dissertation accounts

for public officials' shortcuts and behavioral routines when interacting with certain groups and determining their political relevance (Braun, 2013; Jones, 2003).

1.4 Research setting: Interest groups active at EU level

To examine the research questions introduced in the previous sections, the four empirical chapters focus on data from membership-based interest groups mobilized at the European Union (EU) level. Thus, this dissertation builds upon previous studies looking into the internal dynamics, organizational structures, and representative nature of EU interest groups (Greenwood, 2007; Hollman, 2018; Kohler-Koch, 2010; Kröger, 2018; Rodekamp, 2014).

The focus on interest groups mobilized at the EU level makes for an interesting case both empirically and theoretically. The EU has been emphasizing the need to reach out to interest groups to reinforce its (input) legitimacy and address its democratic deficit (European Commission, 2001, 2002, 2017; Kohler-Koch, 2010; Saurugger, 2008). The problem of 'democratic deficit', which is 'diagnosed in most western democracies' (Arminjon & Ceka, 2014; Halpin, 2010, p. 9; Kratochvíl & Sychra, 2019), is, if anything, more severe within the EU due to the distance between the citizens and the decision-making centers (Weiler, 1999). This is particularly worrisome for the Commission, because it has no constituency or mechanisms to link the institution to European citizens (Kohler-Koch 2010). In order to address this deficit, and as the agenda-setter and policy-formulator actor within the EU, the Commission has put in place one of the most advanced consultation arrangement in the world through which interest groups (and stakeholders more broadly) can engage in policymaking processes (Bunea, 2017). Based on the idea that 'with better involvement comes greater responsibility' (European Commission, 2001, p. 15), the Commission emphasized that all parties involved in policymaking processes 'ought to know if the claims put forward by an organization reflect the concerns of the membership or the constituency' (Kohler-Koch 2010). Accordingly, the European Economic and Social Committee noted in its 2006 'Opinion on the representativeness of European civil society organizations in civic dialogue' that a key criterion to be considered a representative organization was to 'provide for accountability of its members' (European Commission, 2003; 2006, p. 5; see also, Fraussen, Albareda, Braun, & Maloney, 2021). What is more, the EU law, through the Treaty of Lisbon, also highlights the need to increase the legitimacy of the EU when interacting with interest groups, which according to the Article 11 should be "representative associations" (see Trenz, 2009 for a more detailed discussion on this matter).

Importantly, much EU debate on interest groups participation has focused on the 'instrumental character of participation' which assumes that engaging with interest groups will favor the effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy of decision- and policymaking processes (Johansson & Lee, 2014; Kohler-Koch & Buth, 2013; Kröger, 2018; Saurugger,

2008). However, as noted by Grande (2000, p. 129), interest groups contribution to EU policymaking might be questionable ‘insofar as the internal structures of these organizations are rarely internally democratically accountable’ (Saurugger, 2008, p. 1279). And, when groups have democratic structures, they may become less relevant for policymakers due to collective action problems and their difficulties to rapidly supply quality policy input to policymakers (Greenwood & Webster, 2000). This connects with the long-standing debate about democracy vs. technocracy within the EU (Wallace & Smith, 1995): Do EU public officials prioritize input from internally democratic groups so as to redress the so-called democratic deficit, or do they mainly interact with professionalized groups that efficiently provide expert-based policy input? By assessing how interest groups are internally organized, this dissertation aims to bring new light into this debate and improve our understanding of interest groups’ contribution to EU governance.

The focus on interest groups mobilized at the EU level also requires some discussion. As noted by De Bruycker et al. (2019), interest groups that are politically active at the EU level face different challenges than other type of groups. Their ability to be organized as transmission belts that collect, aggregate, synthesize and transfer the preferences of their members to public officials might be affected because of the following reasons: (1) mobilizing and being politically active at the EU level is a costly and cumbersome endeavor; and (2) ‘interest groups working at the EU level, compared to national or local groups, must aggregate a larger and more diverse set of interests (e.g., Kohler-Koch, 2013)’ (De Bruycker et al., 2019, p. 296). In contrast, interest groups mobilized at the (sub)national level are expected to face less hurdles, as they aggregate more homogenous members that presumably have less internal disagreements.

To assess the transmissive function of groups, the empirical chapters focus on membership-based interest groups³. Following Halpin (2006, p. 921), and aligned with the conceptualization of transmission belts, the term members is used to denote a group affiliation inclusive of some involvement in policy formulation and/or the authorization of leaders (see also Jordan and Maloney 1997). In contrast to firms and institutions (such as hospitals or universities), membership-based groups engage more in routine lobbying (Gray & Lowery, 1995; Lowery & Marchetti, 2012, p. 145). More importantly, membership-based groups have a clear representative function that is less straightforward in the case of institutions. In that regard, the groups considered in the four empirical chapters aggregate at least one of the following types of members: individuals (such as citizens or professionals), firms, institutions, and membership-groups and other associations (e.g., NGOs, professional associations, business associations, and other EU umbrella groups) (Albareda, 2021).

Last, this dissertation explores interest groups’ intermediary function in policymaking processes by focusing on public officials and policymakers as a crucial ending point of the transmission belt metaphor (Ainsworth & Sened, 1993; Schmitter & Streeck, 1999).

There are other potentially relevant audiences for politically active interest groups, such as politicians, members of parliament, or the media. However, public officials, as the specialists in the bureaucracy formulating and developing public policies, are in constant interaction with professional communities and interest groups to decide the specificities of particular legislations and the alternatives available (for a review on the relationship between interest groups and the bureaucracy, see Fraussen & Halpin, 2020). Public officials (i.e., policymakers, civil servants and administrative or bureaucratic staff within executive branches) are involved in the different stages of engagement with interest groups, they have a crucial role in deciding who is invited and whose voices are finally taken into account, as they are in charge of drafting legislative proposals that are subsequently sent to members of parliament. In that regard, public officials play a crucial role in policymaking processes (Kingdon, 1984). As a consequence, the dissertation also addresses the question of whose voice is heard and taken into account in policymaking processes (Grossmann, 2012).

1.5 Design and data

The dissertation uses quantitative and qualitative designs to empirically examine the four research questions presented in Table 1.1. In doing so, the dissertation aims to improve the rigor and the validity of the study and its empirical results. More specifically, the empirical chapters make use of three databases to explore the different inter-related questions. These databases come from two large projects: ‘2-Capture: The Driving Forces of Regulatory Capture’⁴, and ‘INTEREURO: Networks, Strategies and Influence in the EU’.⁵ Both projects provide valuable quantitative and qualitative data to explore questions of interest groups’ organizational structure, their ability to function as transmission belts, and the effects of different organizational formats on the political relevance of groups among public officials. The databases are:

- 2-Capture – stakeholders’ database: Interview and survey data from leaders of interest groups involved in 64 EU regulations passed between 2015-2016.
- 2-Capture – public officials’ database: Interview and survey data from senior public officials of the European Commission leading 64 EU regulations passed between 2015-2016.
- INTEREURO Interest Group Survey: Survey data from interest groups mobilized at the EU level.

More specifically, Chapters II and IV make use of the survey data collected in the INTEREURO Interest Group Survey, a component of the INTEREURO project to examine organizational characteristics and policy activities of interest groups active at the EU level.⁶ In total, 2,038 interest organizations were selected from the Transparency Register of the EU, the OECKL Directory. To be included in the sample, the organizations had to fulfil three requirements: (1) EU-level interest organizations which could be EU peak

associations or national organizations with (2) a presence in Brussels and (3) that show some interest in EU policymaking processes. The organizations included in the sample perfectly fit the purpose of this study because, due to their layered structure, they require to put in place a certain organizational structure that defines the interaction between members. The survey was conducted from 9 March to 2 July 2015 and targeted senior leaders of the interest groups (Bernhagen et al., 2016). To assess the determinants of the degree of access to Commission officials (Chapter IV), INTEREURO Interest Group Survey data is combined with the Transparency International – Integrity Watch dataset on Commission meetings.⁷

Chapters III and V rely on two different datasets collected as a part of a research project ‘2-Capture: The Driving Forces of Regulatory Capture’. This project investigates regulatory governance by paying particular attention to the role and engagement of civil society organizations in regulatory processes. To do so, 64 regulations and directives passed at the EU level between 2015-2016 and covering 6 policy domains⁸ have been investigated in depth through document analysis and interviews with public officials responsible of the regulatory dossiers and interest groups involved in them (for more details on the sampling strategy, see Braun, Albareda, Fraussen, & Müller, 2020; Fraussen, Albareda, & Braun, 2020). More specifically, Chapter III makes use of qualitative data obtained through interviews with thirty-two leaders of supranational umbrella groups that were considered as *key actors* by Commission officials when developing a set of regulations (2-Capture: stakeholders’ database). The interviews were conducted between April and December 2019. Chapter V, in contrast, relies on quantitative data from 109 interest groups. The data was collected through interviews conducted between November 2018 and February 2019 with senior public officials of the European Commission leading 29 regulatory dossiers included in the sample (2-Capture: public officials’ database). Thus, in contrast to the previous chapters, this chapter takes the perspective of the public official and examines how these key actors assess and perceive the importance/relevance of the interest groups with whom they interact.

The sampling and selection process of the interest groups considered in Chapters III and V follow a top-down approach, which entail several implications for the generalizability of the results (Berkhout, Beyers, Braun, Hanegraaff, & Lowery, 2018). However, the focus on interest groups that either had access to public officials or that were considered as key actors in policymaking processes is a deliberate choice as they accomplish one of the critical preconditions to be considered a transmission belt: interacting with public officials. The last chapter of the dissertation discusses the implications of this potential source of bias, as well as other methodological choices, for the validity and generalizability of the findings.

1.6 Outline of the dissertation

The main theoretical argument of the dissertation, in a nutshell, is that to improve our understanding of the transmission belt function of interest groups, it is necessary to focus on how are they internally organized. Subsequently, the dissertation examines when groups are more likely to organize as transmission belts and the consequences of their internal structures and policy capacities for the political relevance of groups. The four empirical chapters summarized below highlight the benefits of considering interest groups' organizational structure and policy capacities as it can help us assess their potential contribution to governance systems.

In order to address the two-fold overarching research question, this dissertation is structured in two blocks. The first one examines "How and when interest group organize themselves as transmission belts". More specifically, **Chapter II** conceptualizes and empirically examines the occurrence of transmission belts among the EU interest groups system.⁹ The results of a cluster analysis show that approximately 33% of the EU groups are organizationally equipped to function as transmission belts. In that regard, the majority of the groups only invest in one of the organizational dimensions related to the transmission belt ideal (i.e., member involvement or organizational capacity). Additionally, the chapter finds a positive relationship between groups having a homogenous membership base and being organized as a transmission belt.

Chapter III takes a step back and focuses on one specific organizational dimensions of the transmission belt which critically determines the representative function and the legitimacy claims of interest groups: member involvement. More specifically, the chapter aims at improving our understanding of why and under which circumstances interest groups involve and engage their members when establishing policy positions. The results indicate that unequal resources among the membership-base of umbrella groups as well as issue features shape member involvement in different ways, hence affecting the representative potential of groups. Building upon the results of Chapter II, the qualitative data also shows that membership diversity, in terms of resources, critically affects *which* members are actually involved in the process of establishing policy positions. In addition, policy issues that generate internal conflict are characterized for having more involvement of members, whereas particularistic policy issues (i.e., those that only affect a subset of the members and thus are characterized by less internal conflict), only attract the attention of those members with a stake on the issue.

The second block of the dissertation examines "How the transmissive role and policy capacities of interest groups affect their political relevance". In other words, Chapters IV and V address the implications of interest groups' organizational structure and policy capacities for their degree of access among public officials and their perceived influence on policymaking processes. Firstly, following an exchange-based approach, **Chapter IV** examines the effects that the two organizational dimensions that serve to conceptualize the

transmission belt ideal (i.e., member involvement for representation and organizational capacity to efficiently provide policy input) have on the level of access that interest groups gain to EU public officials. The results of the regression models indicate that groups that invest in organizational capacity have more access to public officials, whereas groups that invest in member involvement and those that are organizationally prepared to function as transmission belts do not have a higher likelihood of gaining more access to EU public officials.

Chapter V argues that political and analytical capacities are demanded by policymakers when developing policy issues and thus affects the level of influence interest groups have on policy issues. The exchange approach perspective is complemented with a behavioral approach and it is argued that public officials' heuristics and routines affect the perceived influence of interest groups. The chapter shows that political and analytical capacities matter for becoming influential on policy issues' outputs. Yet, it also demonstrates that behavioral routines play an important role as they make those groups that are considered policy insiders (i.e., familiar and regular partners) more influential when the degree of advocacy salience is high (i.e., when many stakeholders mobilize in the issue under discussion).

Lastly, **Chapter VI** takes stock of the findings from the previous empirical chapters and provides a through discussion to the main questions of the dissertation and the implications for practice and society. In doing so, it also addresses the main limitations of the dissertation and puts forward potentially interesting avenues for future research to advance our understanding of the intermediary role of interest groups in governance systems.

Notes

- 1 Most of the literature on interest groups rely on broad categorizations distinguishing business from citizen groups (e.g., Dür et al., 2015; Dür & Mateo, 2013). A similar approach has been to distinguish between specific (or sectional) groups representing narrow interest from diffuse (or cause) groups representing interests of broad segments of society. Halpin (2006) distinguishes between solidarity and representative groups, the formers representing constituencies that cannot be present or have their own voice, such as animal protection groups; and the latter representing a closed constituency that can be present and has its own voice and thus is able to authorize and hold the group leaders to account, for instance, an association of medical doctors (see also, Binderkrantz, 2009; Fraussen & Halpin, 2018; Willems, 2020). Lastly, by focusing on the nature of members, Bouwen (2002, 2004) makes an important distinction between national associations (that have individual organizations or citizens as members) and supranational (or European) associations (that have associations as well other organizations as members) (see also Bunea 2014; Eising 2007).
- 2 The conceptualization of transmission belts developed here applies to membership-based interest groups as they are expected to have a representative role that one would not assume – or that is at least more complicated – for non-membership organizations (Schlozman et al., 2015). More specifically, membership-based interest groups are expected to promote a legitimate representation through processes of authorization and accountability between members and representatives. Thus, groups with members require a link to a social constituency that needs to be involved in the development of policy positions (Kröger, 2016, pp. 9–10).
- 3 Chapter V also includes non-membership interest groups (i.e., firms). But the analyses control for these different sorts of groups and the results obtained apply also when exclusively accounting from membership-based groups.
- 4 This research project is led by Caelesta Braun and funded by the Dutch Research Council through a Vidi scheme (grant 452–14–012).
- 5 See: <https://www.intereuro.eu/>
- 6 See: https://acim.uantwerpen.be/files/documentmanager/project/survey_samplingmemo_intereuro.pdf
- 7 The data is offered in an aggregate manner by Transparency International – Integrity Watch. See: <http://www.integrity-watch.eu/about.html>.
- 8 The six different policy areas are: (1) Finance, banking, pensions, securities, insurances; (2) State aids, commercial policies; (3) Health; (4) Sustainability, energy, environment; (5) Transport, telecommunications; (6) Agriculture and fisheries. Importantly, the EU has exclusive or shared competences with the member states in these domains.
- 9 For the sake of clarity, Chapter II uses the label “Civil Society Organizations” instead of “interest groups”. However, both terms are equally understood and defined in this dissertation (Jordan et al. 2004; Beyers et al. 2008).

Chapter II

Connecting Society and Policymakers? Conceptualizing and Measuring the Capacity of Civil Society Organizations to Act as Transmission Belts

An adapted version of this chapter was published as an article in *Voluntas* as:

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ABSTRACT

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are considered important intermediaries between citizens and policymakers. They are assumed to function as transmission belts that filter societal preferences and channel them to policymakers. Although the ability of CSOs to connect civil society with policymakers has been put into question, it has rarely been theoretically specified and empirically tested. This paper develops a conceptualization of CSOs that examines their capacity to function as transmission belts. It does so by distinguishing two organizational dimensions related to member involvement and organizational capacity. The paper draws on a large survey of CSOs active at the EU to empirically assess these organizational dimensions and relate them to basic CSOs' characteristics. The findings indicate that one out of three organizations approximate the ideal type transmission belt. The findings contribute to a better understanding and assessment of CSO's potential contribution to policymaking in representative democracies.

2.1 Introduction

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are crucial intermediary organizations that connect citizens with policymakers (Easton, 1971; Putnam, 1993; Rasmussen, Carroll, & Lowery, 2014; Truman, 1951). By acting as transmission belts between the preferences of civil society and the actions of policymakers, CSOs can supplement the deficiencies of public institutions and contribute to a well-functioning democracy, promoting the legitimacy and effectiveness of governance systems (Greenwood, 2007; Kohler-Koch, 2010). Yet, as several studies have indicated, the representative function of many CSOs is severely flawed (Binderkrantz, 2009; Halpin, 2006; Jordan & Maloney, 2007; Kohler-Koch, 2010). And even when CSOs successfully involve their membership base to ensure representativeness, they may lack the organizational capacity that facilitates an effective interaction with policymakers (Schmitter & Streeck, 1999; van der Pijl & Sminia, 2004).

The idea that CSOs function as transmission belts denotes, although often implicitly, that they are able to aggregate member preferences and efficiently transfer these to policymakers. To date, and despite the burgeoning literature on CSOs and interest groups in general, there is little understanding of how well CSOs manage this balancing act to fulfill a transmission belt capacity. The main reason for this gap in the literature is that scholarly work has usually emphasized just one of the constituting elements of the transmission belt. Studies focus either on membership involvement (Binderkrantz, 2009; Jordan & Maloney, 1998; Kohler-Koch, 2010; Moe, 1991), or on the organizational capacities developed to be more professionalized (Klüver, 2012a; Klüver & Saurugger, 2013; Maloney, 2015; Skocpol, 2003), but not on how CSOs can and do manage the combination of these two aspects. Furthermore, most studies use indirect variables and proxies to assess CSO membership involvement and organizational capacity – the most frequent ones being resources, organizational type (citizen vs. business groups), scope of action (specialist vs. generalist organizations), and organizational scale (individual organizations, national associations, or supranational associations) – thereby obscuring key organizational processes that facilitate the transmission belt function. We thus do not have a clear understanding of how organizational processes can contribute to a genuine transmission belt function of CSOs, a function that is often assumed or required by public institutions. This is problematic as it results in limited knowledge of the role of CSOs in representative democracy and hinders a good understanding of how public institutions might involve them in a more effective way.

This paper aims to fill this gap by unpacking the organizational structure of CSOs and examining how it relates to fulfilling a transmission belt role. By focusing on the internal structure of CSOs, the paper builds upon recent work that has highlighted the importance of organizational factors for connecting CSOs with their members and transfer their demands to policymakers (Berkhout, 2013; Binderkrantz, 2009; Braun, 2013, 2015; Fraussen & Beyers, 2016; Fraussen, Beyers, & Donas, 2015; Halpin, 2014; Halpin,

Fraussen, & Nownes, 2018; Klüver, 2012a; Minkoff et al., 2008; Muñoz Marquez, 2016; Naoi & Krauss, 2009). Drawing on these studies in conjunction with organizational theory, the paper conceptualizes the transmission belt function by distinguishing two organizational dimensions directly related to the two audiences with whom CSOs mostly interact: members and policymakers (Ainsworth & Sened, 1993). Importantly, involving members and having organizational capacity to be politically active may lead to organizational tensions (Maloney & Saurugger, 2014; Schmitter & Streeck, 1999; van der Pijl & Sminia, 2004), hindering CSOs' capacity to function as transmission belts. However, there is limited evidence on whether this trade-off in fact exists. This paper draws on a large survey of CSOs active at the European Union (EU) level to test the occurrence of the two organizational dimensions and, hence, the capacity of CSOs to relay members' preferences to policymakers (Kohler-Koch, 2010; Schmitter & Streeck, 1999; van der Pijl & Sminia, 2004). In other words, this paper examines the transmission belt capacity of CSOs by focusing on their organizational structure, which reflects member involvement (i.e., internal democratic structures) and organizational capacity (i.e., features aimed at efficiently generating, processing, and transferring information to policymakers). The focus on these organizational dimensions enables us to assess how much organizational variety exist among CSOs and how many of them are effectively organized as transmission belts. The paper shows that one out of every three CSOs at the EU level are effectively organized as a transmission belt as they invest in structures to foster representativeness of their members and, simultaneously, have the features that facilitate an effective interaction with policymakers. Yet, the majority of CSOs do not invest in both organizational dimensions at the same time and, thus, do not have the same potential contribution to a legitimate and effective EU governance.

2.2 Unpacking the Transmission Belt: Dimensions of Organizational Structure

Any organization has to design a formal structure to effectively implement a strategy and reach their goals (Chandler, 1962). CSOs are no exception. Defined in its broader sense, the term CSO includes organizations representing social and economic players (e.g., trade unions, employers' federations, consumer organizations and non-governmental organizations), organizations that bring people together in a common cause (e.g., environmental organizations and human rights groups), and organizations pursuing member-oriented objectives (e.g., youth organizations and family associations) (European Commission, 2002, p. 6). As such, CSOs are complex entities that require certain organizational structures to reach their objectives. Thus, when CSOs are formed, the leadership together with members and other key stakeholders need to respond to the inescapable question of 'how should we organize' (Halpin, 2014, p. 85). From a functionalist approach, the organizational structure of CSOs is aimed at solving collective action problems and achieve desired outcomes for their membership base as effective and efficiently as possible (Williamson,

1981). In this perspective, the main assumption is that the organizational structure 'X' is an instrument for achieving calculable and predictable control of organizational performance, and thus, it serves function 'Y' (Pierson, 2000, p. 476). Accordingly, the organizational structure of CSOs can be conceived as a driver for the successful formulation and implementation of strategies, and thus, for achieving organizational goals (Greenwood & Miller, 2010).

As intermediary organizations that relay constituents' demands to policymakers, CSOs that intend to act as transmission belts require organizational attributes that enhance their ability to speak and interact with their two main audiences: members and policymakers (Ainsworth & Sened, 1993)¹⁰. In their seminal article, Schmitter and Streeck (1999, p. 19) note that CSOs have to, on the one hand, 'structure themselves and act so as to offer sufficient incentives to their members to extract from them adequate resources to ensure their survival, if not growth. On the other hand, they must be organized in such a way as to offer sufficient incentives to enable them to gain access to and exercise adequate influence over public authorities.' Hence, CSOs aiming to operate as transmission belts have to ensure that their work is well received by both their members and policymakers (Jordan & Maloney, 2007); and, consequently, set up adequate organizational structures to fulfill these objectives. Specifically, CSOs require organizational features that facilitate the alignment of preferences with their members (Kohler-Koch, 2010), but also the structures that enable them to efficiently generate, process and transfer valuable resources to policymakers. To examine the extent to which CSOs are organized as transmission belts, the paper builds upon an organizational configuration approach (cf., Miller, 1996; Mintzberg, 1979; Short, Payne, & Ketchen, 2008). This approach enables to depict common patterns across CSOs and develop typologies of organizations that resemble each other along the critical organizational dimensions identified to accomplish the transmission belt function: member involvement and organizational capacity.

2.2.1 Member involvement

Members are the inner core of CSOs' constituency. As such, membership involvement is essential to derive legitimacy for their advocacy and lobbying activities by claiming broad representativeness (Johansson & Lee, 2014, p. 405). When policymakers seek to increase input legitimacy through stakeholder involvement, representative CSOs are expected to be better positioned to make their voice heard. Being attentive to members' preferences is also important for maintenance and survival of organizations (Wilson, 1995), in particular for those whose budget highly relies on membership fees. Moreover, involving the membership-base, and thus being responsive towards their demands, is a critical internal element that shapes the identity of the organization (Heaney, 2004) and the issues prioritized in the policy agenda of the organization (Halpin et al., 2018).

Despite these inducements to actively involve members, previous work has demonstrated that CSOs engage with members to different degrees and that organizations have different representation strategies (Johansson & Lee, 2014). Some CSOs are structured to actively involve their members, gather their opinions and preferences, and act accordingly. In contrast, other CSOs have a managerialist discourse and work as professionalized oligarchies where the senior staff has the autonomy and discretion to take every relevant decision without consulting with a largely passive membership base that is weakly involved in the internal functioning of the organization (Jordan & Maloney, 2007; Maier & Meyer, 2011).

There is a large variety of tools and methods to involve members (e.g., consultation mechanisms, internal surveys, plenary and ad-hoc meetings, and involvement of members in executive bodies and working groups); yet, as shown by Johansson and Lee (2014), CSOs rely heavily on formal structures to involve their members in the internal functioning. In this vein, this paper conceptualizes member involvement with three crucial formal elements that enable CSOs to collect and aggregate members' preferences and become representative organizations, these are: the processes set up to facilitate interaction among members and CSOs representatives (Hayes, 1986); the decision-making system (Berry, 1984); and the formal connections between the organization and its local/regional constituency (Skocpol, 2003).

Firstly, providing a forum where members can interact among themselves and with representatives of the CSO is conceived as crucial to facilitate member involvement (Hayes, 1986; McFarland, 2010, p. 55). As highlighted by Jordan and Maloney (2007, p. 2), CSOs should 'offer opportunities for face interaction to enhance social integration and democracy itself.' Besides, the interaction among members is an occasion to develop quality relationships, foster the cohesion of the organization, and promote a more homogenous message across members. As specified by Albers et al. (2013), the relationship derived from the interaction of members cultivates ties, supports the development of trust in the organization, and strengthens the flow of information among members and between members and the organization.

Secondly, the decision-making system determine the actual power of members to establish positions and strategies (Berry, 1984; Binderkrantz, 2009; Halpin & Fraussen, 2017b; Hollman, 2018). CSOs can be subject to the preferences of their members or, instead, may delegate the decision-making power to the executive board, the leader of the organization, or to senior staff. When decisions are taken by members, it means that these actors have strong powers to determine the avenues of the organization. Using Berry et al.'s (1993) terms, decision-making systems are about the depth of participation of members in a group. More generally, engaging members in decision-making is a way to internalize conflict and, as a consequence, the likelihood that members take individual steps to circumvent the organization is reduced (Hollman, 2018).

Finally, the organizational structures set to reach the local constituency of the CSO ease the engagement of members that are not based in the same location as the headquarters of the organization and strengthen the societal embeddedness of the organization (Fraussen et al., 2015; Skocpol, 2003). Having local branches ensures that the long chain of representation of multi-layered CSOs is not broken (Johansson & Lee, 2014; Kohler-Koch, 2012, p. 818). That is, CSOs with local branches are expected to have closer connections to the membership base and empower the grassroots, thus, facilitating the involvement of every member. Making a parallel with the political party literature, local branches constitute the most tightly knit connection between CSO representatives and their constituency (Poguntke, 2002, p. 9).

2.2.2 Organizational capacity

Apart from involving their members, CSOs intending to function as transmission belts also aim to gain access to policymakers and shape public policy. Consequently, it is necessary to assess the organizational capacity, that is, an organization's potential to achieve its mission and objectives (Eisinger, 2002). For a CSO that aims to operate as a transmission belt, organizational capacity refers to those organizational features that enable them to efficiently generate, process, and transfer information from members to policymakers (Daugbjerg et al., 2018; Schmitter & Streeck, 1999). More specifically, organizations need to go beyond loose and network-type organizational arrangements and become more formalized entities with autonomy, hierarchical structures and certain levels of specialization (Schmitter & Streeck, 1999).

Recent studies have empirically shown that there is an increasing trend towards the professionalization of CSOs (Klüver & Saurugger, 2013; Maloney, 2015; Skocpol, 2003). The conceptualization of organizational capacity highly relies and speaks to the idea of professionalization, in particular to having the expertise to generate technical knowledge and centralized governance structures pursuing a technocratic and scientific approach to organizational maintenance and influence (Maloney, 2015). However, in contrast to the literature on professionalization (Klüver & Saurugger, 2013; Maloney, 2015), this paper assumes that organizational capacity is compatible with having active membership, which is indispensable to attain the transmission belt ideal.¹¹

Importantly, not all CSOs have the organizational attributes that are expected to foster organizational capacity. Whereas organizations like Friends of the Earth or Greenpeace have autonomous and centralized structures and generate cutting-edge expertise, professional associations of lawyers or doctors are more focused on exchanging information and on determining professional standards and good practices. As can be inferred from the previous discussion, CSOs that want to increase their likelihood of shaping public policy require three organizational elements that determine their capacity to efficiently generate, process, and transfer information to policymakers. These organizational features are: au-

tonomy (Verhoest, Peters, Bouckaert, & Verschuere, 2004), centralization (Christensen, Lægreid, & Rykkja, 2016), and functional differentiation (Pugh, Hickson, Hinings, & Turner, 1968).

Autonomy is understood as the delegation of discretionary authority to the secretariat, the office or the senior leadership of the organization (cf., King, Felin, & Whetten, 2010). That is, an autonomous CSO has the delegated power from its members to act on their behalf. This paper focuses on de-facto and operational autonomy, which comprises the actual decision-making competences of CSOs with regard to specific subject matter (Bach, 2014, p. 345). This type of autonomy enhances managerial flexibility, contributes to better services, and fosters organizational efficiency (Pollitt, Talbot, Caulfield, & Smullen, 2004). In this vein, autonomy enables the organization to rapidly react to specific events or changing policy environments and, subsequently, it is expected to increase the efficiency in which CSOs process and transfer information to policymakers.

Secondly, CSOs' centralization is understood as the hierarchical integration that serves as a mechanism to coordinate the vertical and horizontal specialization of an organization (Christensen et al., 2016). In centralized CSOs, the apex of the organization (i.e., top representatives), has significant formal and informal power to control the decisions and activities of the organization. In contrast, in a decentralized CSO, mid-managers in charge of departments or committees are expected to have considerable leeway when taking and implementing decisions and to be loosely connected among themselves and with the apex of the organization (Damanpour, 1991). Through centralization, CSOs can minimize internal conflict, overcome 'silo-thinking', feed the different units of the organization, and produce valuable information that goes beyond particular niches (Young, 1992). Centralized CSOs not only ensure unity of command and coordination, safeguarding a smooth transmission of member preferences to policymakers, they also favor the accumulation and exchange of information and knowledge produced by the different units and branches of a CSO (Caimo & Lomi, 2015).

Lastly, functional differentiation refers to the development of organizational units or committees that deal with concrete policy issues (Klüver, 2012a). It is defined as the division of labor within an organization and the distribution of official duties among several positions (Pugh et al. 1968: 72–3). Organizational scholars also refer to this feature as horizontal specialization or complexity, which measures the number of different occupational specialties or specialized units at a given hierarchical level (Fioretti & Bauke, 2004). Functional differentiation might be understood as an organizational element that processes the preferences of members and produces specialized knowledge that, ultimately, can be used to generate valuable information for policymakers. In this vein, being functionally differentiated is an organizational mechanism to internalize interdependencies and generate research capacity (Fraussen & Halpin, 2017).

2.2.3 Transmission Belts: A Balancing Act between Member Involvement and Organizational Capacity

As discussed earlier, the combination of the two dimensions (i.e., member involvement and organizational capacity) is crucial for CSOs to forge a transmission belt capacity. Ideally, a genuine transmission belt requires both involving members and having organizational capacity, and therefore CSOs need to have most of the items in each of these two organizational dimensions. Yet, this is a complex organizational endeavor and, as highlighted by Kohler-Koch (2012, p. 815), it is not clear whether and how CSOs ‘manage to reconcile the contradictory demands of effective lobbying and boosting democratic participation.’ This twofold objective ‘puts substantial organizational demands on groups’ (Berkhout et al., 2017, p. 1126), and, as noted by van der Pijl and Sminia (2004), may lead to organizational dilemmas that CSOs need to solve (cf., Schmitter & Streeck, 1999). That is, CSOs struggle to find a balance between engaging their members in democratic structures while being politically active in an efficient manner.

Indeed, some of the objectives linked to the organizational items presented above might be difficult to combine. At a general level, these two organizational dimensions reflect two somewhat contradictory approaches: one bottom-up – emphasizing the heterogeneity of members and the need to represent every single voice within the organization – and the other one top-down – emphasizing homogeneity and the need to control members (van der Pijl & Sminia, 2004). In this vein, fostering member involvement may lead to the inclusion of different voices present in the organization and strengthen its representativeness character, but it is also linked to cumbersome consultations processes that hamper the capacity of CSOs to efficiently respond to policy demands in changing environments (Hollman, 2018). In contrast, centralized and autonomous organizations tend to be more addressable (Rajwani, Lawton, & Phillips, 2015), that is, they are able to speak with one single voice in an efficient way. This may represent an advantage when seeking access to policymakers pressured by time and resources (Braun, 2013; van Schendelen, 2005), but it also can damage the representativeness of the organization and its capacity to provide input legitimacy to policymakers.

Even though the combination of member involvement and organizational capacity implies clear difficulties and requires overcoming tensions and dilemmas (Jordan & Maloney, 2007; Klüver & Saurugger, 2013), CSOs that invest in both dimensions are organizationally prepared to effectively rely citizens’ demands to policymakers. Importantly, the constituting elements of each organizational dimension presented above are not mutually exclusive. Thus, CSOs can actively involve their members in democratic ways and have the structures that characterize organizational capacity. In other words, some CSOs are expected to be able to accommodate the two organizational dimensions and, thus, approximate the transmission belt ideal.

While this paper focuses on the structures that facilitate information flow from members to the leadership of the organization, it is also important to acknowledge that this relationship might work in the opposite direction. That is, the leadership of the organization may be able to shape members' attitudes and preferences (Berkhout, 2013). This is particularly true in the case of transmission belts because they have the necessary capacity to influence their membership base through their own expertise and, at the same time, they have the organizational attributes that facilitate communication with members. In short, the relationship between members and CSOs, particularly among transmission belts, is expected to be bi-directional.

2.3 Research Design and Data

To empirically study the extent to which CSOs organize themselves to function as a transmission belt, the paper relies on data from the INTEREURO-project, and more specifically from the INTEREURO Interest Group Survey, a tool designed to examine organizational characteristics and policy activities performed by interest groups to influence policymaking at the EU level. For the first time, this survey generates large-*n* data on the internal functioning of CSOs active at the EU level. The survey was conducted from 9 March to 2 July 2015 and targeted senior leadership of CSOs (Bernhagen et al., 2016). Initially, 2,028 organizations were selected from the Transparency Register of the EU, the OECKL Directory, and via elite interviews and media analyses (Beyers et al., 2016). The object of study of the survey were European and national associations, therefore, firms and individual organizations were excluded from the population. In total, 738 organizations completed the questionnaire, reaching a response rate of 36.2%. To test how the organizational dimensions considered apply to different types of CSOs, the sample includes business as well as citizen CSOs, and excludes all the organizations that are not categorized in any of these two groups as well as organizations without members.¹² This reduces the sample to 500 organizations.

The focus on the CSOs mobilized at the EU level is justified by institutional as well as organizational factors. At the institutional level, CSO's participation is considered as an important way to 'nurture EU's weak democratic legitimacy and contribute to more effective policymaking by bringing the voice of civil society' (Johansson & Lee, 2014, p. 407). EU institutions actively reach out to organizations that link members with decision-makers and as such contribute to the legitimacy and effectiveness of EU governance (European Commission, 2001, 2002; Kohler-Koch, 2010). In this vein, the role of CSOs is particularly relevant at the EU level because they are expected to mediate the representative distance between society and the EU (Greenwood, 2007). At the organizational level, CSOs active in the EU are complex (multi-layered) entities that require certain organizational structure to involve their members and engage with policymakers. The

focus on CSOs at the EU level has obvious implications in terms of generalization that are discussed in the concluding section of the paper.

Table 2.1 presents the operationalization of the six items included to measure the two organizational dimensions. These variables are based on different questions of the INTE-REURO Interest Groups Survey. Firstly, the presence or absence of a general assembly or an annual meeting is considered as crucial to enable the involvement of members in the work of the organization (Jordan & Maloney, 2007; McFarland, 2010); and thus, this binary measure is intended to measure the “Interaction” among members and between members and CSOs’ leadership. Secondly, the measurement of “Decision-making” relies on two sub-items of the questionnaire that are key for CSOs’ strategy, namely how they make decisions when (1) establishing their organization’s position on policy issues and (2) deciding on advocacy/lobbying strategies and tactics (Binderkrantz, 2009). These two items have been grouped based on the results of a principal component analysis (PCA), and confirmed by an acceptable level of a Cronbach’s alpha test of reliability ($\alpha = .700$) (Field, 2009, p. 675). This variable has been recoded as 1 when members are involved in the decision-making process and 0 when otherwise, thus, showing the formal decision-making capacity of members to determine the fate of the organization (Johansson & Lee, 2014). Thirdly, “Local chapters” is based on a single question aimed at identifying whether the organization has local or regional branches (Fraussen et al., 2015).

Regarding the second dimension on organizational capacity, “Autonomy” reflects whether the senior staff of the organization has decision-making competences on budgetary issues and hiring staff. By focusing on operational autonomy, which indicates the capacity of the group to take human resource management decisions by itself, this variable is conceived as a powerful indicator of the ‘degree of [member] interference in the day-to-day management of the [group]’ (Bach, 2014, 345). Results have been recoded as 1 when the senior staff can decide on both issues and 0 when otherwise. “Centralization” is a construct that captures whether the apex of the CSO (i.e., executive director, the chair of the board, and the board of directors) is somewhat or very influential when (1) establishing EU positions and (2) deciding on advocacy and lobbying tactics. Thus, this operationalization reflects the effective concentration of power/influence on the apex of the organization (Albers et al., 2013; Damanpour, 1991), or in Pugh et al.’s (1963) terms, the real authority of CSOs’ apex. The variable relies on six items that have been grouped after examining the data with a PCA and estimating the reliability of the construct ($\alpha = .786$). Finally, “Functional differentiation” reflects whether CSOs have committees for specific tasks or not (Klüver, 2012a, p. 496). Appendix to Chapter II presents the complete list of questions used to construct the two dimensions and Table AI includes a correlation matrix among the main variables.¹³

Table 2.1. Measuring Transmission Belts: Member Involvement and Organizational Capacity

Item	Operationalization
<i>Member involvement</i>	
Interaction	0 = Organizations do not have a general assembly or an annual general meeting. 1 = Organizations have a general assembly or an annual general meeting.
Decision-making	0 = Members do not participate in the decision-making processes when establishing positions and defining strategies. 1 = Members participate in the decision-making processes when establishing positions and defining strategies.
Local chapters	0 = Organizations do not have local or regional chapters. 1 = Organizations have local or regional chapters.
<i>Organizational capacity</i>	
Autonomy	0 = The senior staff of the organization does not have decision-making power on the budget or on hiring staff. 1 = The senior staff of the organization has decision-making power on the budget and on hiring staff.
Centralization	0 = The apex of the organizations is not influential when establishing positions and defining strategies. 1 = The apex of the organization is influential when establishing positions and defining strategies.
Functional differentiation	0 = The organization does not have committees for specific tasks. 1 = The organization has committees for specific tasks.

To further explore variation in the organizational forms resulting from the cluster analysis, the paper considers five basic characteristics of CSOs: type of CSO, age, resources, organizational scale, and membership diversity. Type of CSO distinguishes whether the organization is composed of business organizations (i.e., trade, business & professional associations) or if, instead, gathers citizen organizations (i.e., non-governmental organizations, platforms and networks and similar). Organization age indicates how old the CSO is. Resources are measured via the equivalent employees working full time in the organizations. Organizational scale indicates whether CSOs are national or a supranational association. Lastly, we include membership diversity, which captures how many different types of members has each CSO, the options being: individual members, firms, local and regional governments, national associations, and European associations (see Table AII in Appendix to Chapter II for descriptive statistics and correlations among variables).

2.4 Analysis

The analyses proceed in two steps. Firstly, the paper presents the results of cluster analysis to, subsequently, examine how the resulting clusters relate to basic characteristics of CSOs presented in the previous section.

A cluster analysis is conducted to examine how the constructs of member involvement and organizational capacity are distributed across CSOs. This approach offers a description of organizations by identifying organizational forms of CSOs that resemble each other

along the two dimensions identified (Short et al., 2008, p. 1054). Hence, cluster analysis fits the purposes of the paper, namely to assess the extent to which the organizational structure of CSOs conforms to the ideal type transmission belt, and to reveal possible variations. The cluster analysis gathers CSOs into categories such that organizations in the same cluster are more alike to each other than to other clusters (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2008). More specifically, the chosen analysis is Ward's method, a type hierarchical clustering aimed at joining cases into clusters such that the variance within a cluster is minimized (Szekely & Rizzo, 2005). This agglomerative method is appropriate when no outliers are present and when equally sized clusters are expected (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011).¹⁴ The number of clusters considered is based on the interpretation of the Ward's linkage cluster dendrogram (see Figure A1 in Appendix to Chapter II). To cross-validate this result, the same analysis has been conducted with 10 subsamples (Gordon, 1998). The resulting clusters of the subsamples have been compared to the ones obtained in the complete sample. In every case, the results of the chi-square tests comparing the clusters of the whole sample with the ones of the subsamples are significant, confirming the validity of the findings.

Table 2.2 presents the main results of the cluster analysis (see also Figure A2 in Appendix to Chapter II). The cluster analysis generates four different combinations of the two dimensions. That is, based on the presence of the organizational features associated with involving members and having organizational capacity, the analysis discerns four different ways in which CSOs organize.¹⁵ This finding is aligned with previous studies that highlighted organizational diversity among CSOs, even within citizen or business CSOs (Baroni et al., 2014; Minkoff et al., 2008). More specifically, the results show a similar pattern to what Minkoff et al. (2008) found in the US context: there is substantial variation in the organizational structures of CSOs active at the EU level. This variation is very relevant considering the institutional pressure (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) at the EU level for organizations that function as transmission belts (European Commission, 2001, 2002), or that are professionalized (Klüver & Saurugger, 2013; Maloney, 2015). Despite these isomorphic forces, CSOs seem to have some degree of discretion to develop the organizational structure that they believe is more appropriate for their own purposes, and not the one that is mostly demanded from public institutions.

Out of the 268 observations¹⁶ included in the analysis, 44 CSOs (16.42%) have an organizational structure that score low in both member involvement and organizational capacity. Consequently, organizations in this cluster are labeled as Passive. More specifically, CSOs in this cluster have a poorly developed organizational structure and can be considered as loose and weakly connected networks that invest few resources to engage with their own members or have organizational capacity.

The second cluster (i.e., Representative organizations) gathers 39 CSOs (14.55%) that possess organizational features that foster member involvement, yet do not have the char-

acteristics that are considered indicative of the capacity to generate, process and transfer members' preferences and information to policymakers. Hence, Representative organizations are mainly oriented towards their membership base, promoting participation and fostering the internal cohesion. These organizations are more akin to what Schmitter and Streeck termed clubs or forums, with organizational structures that facilitate interaction among members, participation in collective activities, exchange of information and expertise, and formation of a collective identity (Schmitter & Streeck, 1999). The existence of such a cluster demonstrates that, despite the current debate about the democratic flaws of organized interests (Halpin, 2010; Jordan & Maloney, 2007), there are still some organizations that have the necessary organizational features to be internally democratic. Yet, the low percentage of Representative CSOs is surprising considering the EU's explicit request for representative CSOs that are connected with their members (Kohler-Koch, 2010).

The third cluster gathers 98 CSOs (36.57%) with those organizational features that are expected to foster their capacity to effectively generate, process, and transfer information to policymakers. However, as the structure to engage with members and supporters of most of the organizations in this cluster is under-developed, they have been labelled as Capable organizations. This finding is aligned with Halpin's (2006) observation that not all CSOs seek representation. Additionally, it speaks to the trend towards professionalization that has been identified at the EU level (Jordan & Maloney, 2007; Klüver & Saurugger, 2013; Maloney, 2015). As noted by Van Deth and Maloney (2012) there is a gradual change in which organizations become more specialized and centralized and give less priority to organizational democracy. In this regard, organizations in this cluster are expected to be more strongly focused on policy advocacy and on the provision of expertise to policymakers. A paradigmatic example of an organization clustered as 'Capable' is Friends of the Earth Europe, an organization that, as Rootes (2009, pp. 210–211) noted, was not 'established to be responsive or accountable to members. Instead, they were founded to be "uninhibited campaigning" groups and campaign effectiveness was privileged over democratic involvement.' Intriguingly, results indicate that there are twice as many Capable groups as Representative ones. As noted, this is surprising if we consider the rhetoric of the Commission and its preference for representative groups that favor democratic participation (European Commission, 2001, 2002); yet, the dominance of Capable over Representative groups is aligned with recent research assessing the representational capacity and the policy engagement of interest groups at the EU level (Berkhout et al., 2017).

Finally, 87 organizations (32.46%) closely approximate the transmission belt ideal, with a high potential to link members' preferences to policymakers (Berkhout et al., 2017; Braun, 2015). More specifically, these CSOs are able to effectively represent their members thanks to democratic structures, and transform the preferences of their members and other organizational resources into relevant access goods for policymakers. Because of their ability to integrate both dimensions, organizations in this cluster have been labelled

as Balanced. CSOs in this cluster meet the demands of the Commission for representative organizations that effectively functions as intermediaries of the public, enhancing input and output legitimacy of EU institutions (European Commission, 2001; Greenwood, 2007; Kohler-Koch & Quittkat, 2013). Additionally, the existence of this cluster demonstrates that the tensions and dilemmas associated with having both organizational dimensions are not insurmountable. That is, even though involving members and having organizational capacity is not easy or cheap (Jordan & Maloney, 2007), an important number of CSOs successfully combine both organizational dimensions.

Table 2.2. Comparison of Cluster Characteristics¹⁷

Mean (S.D.)	Passive	Representative	Capable	Balanced	Total
Member involvement[†]	1* (0.431)	2.360* (0.486)	1 (0)	1.966* (0.283)	1.511 (0.633)
<i>Interaction[†]</i>	0.841* (0.370)	1 (0)	0.969 (0.173)	1 (0)	0.963 (0.190)
<i>Decision-making[†]</i>	0.091* (0.291)	0.692* (0.468)	0.031* (0.173)	0.609* (0.491)	0.325 (0.469)
<i>Local chapters[†]</i>	0.068* (0.255)	0.667* (0.477)	0 (0)	0.356* (0.481)	0.224 (0.418)
Capacity[†]	0.750* (0.438)	1.282* (0.456)	2 (0)	2.103* (0.306)	1.724 (0.592)
<i>Autonomy[†]</i>	0.023* (0.151)	0 (0)	0.041 (0.199)	0.149* (0.359)	0.067 (0.251)
<i>Centralization[†]</i>	0.454* (0.504)	0.718* (0.456)	1 (0)	0.977* (0.151)	0.862 (0.346)
<i>Functional differentiation[†]</i>	0.272* (0.451)	0.564* (0.502)	0.959* (0.199)	0.977* (0.151)	0.795 (0.405)
TOTAL % (n)	16.42 (44)	14.55 (39)	36.57 (98)	32.46 (87)	100 (268)

P-values ([†]) indicate significance for a test of equality of a variable's distribution among the four clusters; analysis of variance for continuous variables and Pearson chi-square for categorical variables.

P-values (*) indicate significance for a test of equality of a variable's distribution within a cluster versus the variable's overall distribution; t-statistics for continuous variables and Pearson chi-square for categorical variables.

*, [†] p < .05

To further explore these results, this second part of the section examines the relationship between the four clusters and five basic variables of CSOs: type of organization (i.e., citizens vs. businesses), organizational age, resources, organizational scale, and membership diversity. Results in Table 2.3 do not present a clear linkage between CSO characteristics and the four clusters. That is, none of the five characteristics is related to the four organizational forms resulting from the cluster analysis. Yet, there are significant relationships in Table 2.3 that are worth discussing. Firstly, being Representative, Capable or Balanced is

not significantly related with whether the CSO gathers citizen or business organizations. With the only exception of Passive organizations which are significantly associated to citizen groups, the results demonstrate that the distinction between business and citizen groups, and the assumptions linked to each of them, does not hold when considering the organizational form of CSOs (cf., Hollman, 2018). More specifically, our findings suggest that business and citizen groups are equally capable to function as transmission belts (Flöthe & Rasmussen, 2018), which contradicts previous investigations that find significant relationship between being a business group and acting as transmission belt (Berkhout et al., 2017). More generally, this result reinforces the applicability of this conceptualization across any type of CSOs, regardless of whether they are business or citizen organizations. Secondly, the cluster labeled as Passive gathers the youngest organizations. From an organizational perspective, Passive CSOs may be evolving towards one of the three typologies that are regarded as legitimate in the EU environment (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). However, an alternative explanation could be that these younger organizations use new, less formalized, or untraditional mechanisms to communicate with their members and policymakers (cf., Fraussen & Halpin, 2018). Regarding the amount of resources, it is only significantly and positively related with Representative organizations, that is, CSOs that actively involve their members require more resources in terms of staff. Intriguingly,

Table 2.3. Logistic regressions by cluster

	Passive	Representative	Capable	Balanced
CSO Type: Citizens (REF)				
CSO Type: Businesses	.514* (.190)	1.017 (.404)	1.548 (.438)	.953 (.274)
Organizational age	.983* (.010)	1.001 (.008)	1.004 (.006)	1.003 (.006)
Resources (FTE)	.998 (.005)	1.012** (.005)	.995 (.004)	.991 (.007)
Organizational scale: National CSOs (REF)				
Organizational scale: Supranational CSOs	.528 (.247)	1.527 (.899)	.858 (.328)	1.394 (.586)
Membership diversity	.908 (.134)	.999 (.154)	1.274** (.141)	.796* (.098)
Constant	.877 (.550)	.088*** (.068)	.295** (.151)	.587 (.324)
N	248	248	248	248
Log Likelihood	-103.085	-95.256	-159.849	-152.443
Pseud R-square	.05	.06	.03	0.3

Note: Odds Ratio, standard error in parenthesis.

*p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

the distinction between national and supranational CSOs does not matter for explaining their organizational form. Finally, membership diversity (i.e., whether the organizations gathers more or less heterogeneous members) is significantly related with Capable and Balanced organizations, but in opposite ways. Whereas more heterogeneous CSOs tend to organize themselves as Capable organizations that hardly involve their members, homogenous CSOs tend to be organized as Balanced organizations. CSOs with higher levels of membership diversity have lower chances of investing in democratic structures, but do invest in organizational capacity. That is, CSOs with an heterogeneous membership base emphasize a top-down perspective to control their members (van der Pijl & Sminia, 2004; Williamson, 1981). In contrast, the more homogenous the CSO, the higher the likelihood that it can be organized as a transmission belt (Berkhout, 2013; Kröger, 2018). That is, having the same type of members facilitates the development of organizational structures aimed at involving members and at having the necessary organizational structures to generate, process and transfer information to policymakers.

2.5 Conclusion

The capacity of CSOs to act as transmission belts is crucial to their contribution to policy processes and democracy. This paper theoretically develops and empirically assesses the organizational ability of CSOs to function as transmission belts that connect members' preferences with policymakers. As clarified in the introduction, the literature either considers only one side of the transmission belt coin (by focusing on engagement with members *or* on having organizational capacity) or refers to organizational form in very general terms (e.g., by using organizational type as proxy for certain organizational feature and practices). To move the literature forward and increase our understanding of the role of CSOs in policymaking, this paper theoretically unpacks the transmission belt notion based on the distinction of two organizational dimensions: member involvement and organizational capacity. The paper offers a fine-grained conceptualization of the constituting elements of these organizational dimensions and unites them in a new theoretical framework of organizational form to assess the capacity of CSOs to function as transmission belts. This tool can be understood as a foundation to go beyond traditional proxies and to better theorize on the role of CSOs in representative democracies. In this vein, the empirical examination of this conceptualization, indicates that 32% of EU CSOs approximate the ideal type transmission belt, as they have a balanced organizational structure with elements aimed at both involving members and having organizational capacity. This suggest that at least some CSOs indeed are able to manage the tensions related to the challenge of both listening to members and talking to policymakers. Yet, we also observe important variation concerning the organizational form, as the majority of the CSOs do not have the organizational features associated with both processes. While almost 50% of the organizations prioritize either member involvement or organizational capacity, 16%

invest very little in both organizational dimensions. Hence, despite the rhetoric of the Commission and its preference for CSOs that function as transmission belts, there is significant variation in how CSOs are organized, which results in unequal capacities to function as a transmission belt.

It is worth to acknowledge a potential source of bias related to the research design and the EU-centered sample. A particularity of CSOs operating at the EU level is that they are encouraged by EU institutions to function as a transmission belt, which, from an institutional perspective, may lead to higher incidence of this type of organizations (cf., DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Yet, they also face a larger distance between elementary membership units and the decision-making center, which places higher organizational demands to connect members to policymakers. Therefore, the distribution of the different typologies of CSOs identified may vary across institutional settings that place different institutional and organizational pressures on CSOs organizational structure (cf., Berkhout et al., 2017). Consequently, future comparative research could examine the relationship between systems of interest intermediation and the presence of CSOs operating as transmission belts. Besides, this paper has analyzed how CSOs are organized by using reported survey data that tap into key organizational elements of each dimension. Future research might build upon this conceptualization by conducting in-depth qualitative investigations to further examine the validity of the measurement and operationalization of the variables that compose each organizational dimension and to gain more insight on how transmission belts are organized. Lastly, this paper builds upon a functionalist approach to conceptualize CSOs organizational structure. Yet, as has been already noted, the data available does not allow us to know whether CSOs are deliberately organized as they are or if instead, and despite their willingness to be organized in a certain way, they fail to set up the necessary organizational features to achieve their goals. In addition, some CSOs may have concrete organizational structures not because they serve a concrete function, but because they are the most accepted and legitimate in the EU institutional environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This could explain the limited explanatory power of the main features included in the analysis of Table 2.3 and the higher frequency of Balanced and Capable CSOs at the EU level – which are the forms that are more frequently demanded by EU institutions (European Commission, 2001, 2002; Klüver & Saurugger, 2013; Maloney, 2015). In that regard, future research could combine functionalist and institutionalist approaches to assess the extent to which the organizational form of CSOs rationally serve certain functions and respond to institutional and isomorphic forces (cf., Pierson, 2000).

Returning to the role of CSOs in policymaking and democracy, the results obtained suggest that approximately one third of CSOs operating at the EU level can contribute to the legitimacy and effectiveness of EU governance by connecting members and supporters with decision-makers (European Commission 2001, 2002). In contrast to Balanced organizations, the contribution of Representative and Capable organizations to EU governance

can be questioned, or at least seems of a different nature. On the one hand, Representative organizations are relevant to foster input legitimacy and compliance with common goals because of their engagement and strong connection with members. On the other hand, Capable organizations can contribute to EU effectiveness due to their organizational capacity to be politically active. More specifically, Capable organizations can mostly contribute to EU governance with output legitimacy as well as expertise. Consequently, only a minority of CSOs are organizationally prepared to account as surrogates for the democratic deficit of the EU by fostering democratic participation and, in particular, the effectiveness and legitimacy of the policy process. That is, only Balanced organizations are organizationally prepared to contribute with different types of legitimacies and resources that are highly valued by EU institutions. In that regard, future research may also look into whether CSOs that effectively involve members and have organizational capacity are, in fact, more relevant among policymakers, and thus contribute to more legitimate and effective governance systems.

Notes

- 10 Policymakers are those public officials (elected or unelected) responsible for formulating policies (Beyers & Braun, 2014). Hence, policymakers include actors ranging from governmental elites or top politicians to lay civil-servants. At the EU level, policymakers as defined here are found in the three main EU institutions (Commission, Parliament, and Council).
- 11 Organizational capacity has also received significant attention in the nonprofit literature. However, this literature is mostly interested in those capacities that facilitate an effective provision/administration of community services in different sectors (Eisinger, 2002; Fredericksen & London, 2000; Misener & Doherty, 2009), and not so much on the organizational attributes that endow CSOs with a higher capacity to interact with policymakers.
- 12 To be precise, business groups correspond to the following survey category "Trade, business & professional associations", and citizen groups refer to "Non-governmental organizations, platforms and networks and similar". The following categories have been excluded from the sample due to the low number of respondents representing these type of groups (in total they represent 70 organizations): "Organizations representing churches and religious communities" (n=11), "Other public or mixed entities, etc." (n=16), "Other similar organizations to 'public or mixed entities'" (n=12), "Local, regional and municipal authorities (at sub-national level)" (n=17), and "Trade unions" (n=14). Additionally, 128 respondents did not specify the type of group of their organization and, therefore, have been removed from the sample. Lastly, 40 organizations indicated that they did not have members, and, thus, have been excluded from the sample.
- 13 Table AI in Appendix to Chapter II presents a correlation matrix of the six variables used to develop the two dimensions. All the correlation coefficients (excluding the ones between the dimensions and the items they are based on) are below 0.400, ensuring that these are independent variables measuring distinct elements of the organizational structure of CSOs. Additionally, the independence of the variables has been further investigated to ensure that none of the features is a pre-condition to have a 'second' item. For instance, it could be argued that CSOs need 'Interaction' to actually involve members in 'Decision-making'. However, a close analysis shows that 34.29% of CSO without 'Interaction' actually involve members in decision-making. In this vein, strategic decision making by all the members may be done through non-plenary or face-to-face meetings but via ad-hoc or virtual meetings, or even via emails or one-to-one consultations between the organization and its members.
- 14 The expectation of equally sized clusters is based on the results of previous works that find substantial variation of categories of CSOs when considering organizational elements (Baroni et al., 2014; Minkoff et al., 2008). Because the two dimensions are equally important to function as a transmission belt, there is no need to weight them, nor to control by which one is more relevant when determining the final clusters. Furthermore, since both dimensions have the same scale, there is no need to standardize the data to prevent a variable with high variability from dominating the cluster analysis.
- 15 To further validate the results, a discriminant analysis of the identified clusters and the two dimensions included in the clustering process has been conducted. Results indicate that 96.64% of the CSOs were correctly classified by the discriminant analysis. If the cases are classified manually in a two-by-two matrix where ranking 0 and 1 is considered as low and 2 and 3 is regarded as high, then we see that 93.1% of the cases fall into the same categories.
- 16 Missing data is mainly explained by non-responses to the questions used to construct the variable "Centralization." This variable has 38% of missing responses (n=223). A t-test analysis for each variable has been conducted to assess non-response bias of the main variables. Results are not significant for any of the two organizational dimensions.
- 17 The internal validity of the results of the cluster analysis is analyzed by testing the differences between the clusters and the variables used to obtain the clusters. The test of equality of the variable's distribution among the four clusters shows that the two dimensions, as well as the six variables used to construct them, vary significantly across the four resulting clusters. Moreover, the test of equality of a variable's distribution within a cluster versus the variable's overall distribution indicates that all the variables within clusters differ significantly from the same variables in the other clusters. The only non-significant results are those variables with integer values and no standard variation. Furthermore, the variables "Interaction" for Representative and Capable organizations and "Autonomy" for Representative organizations also have non-significant distributions when compared with the overall distribution.

Chapter III

Inside Transmission Belts: How Umbrella Groups Involve Members in Establishing Policy Positions

This chapter is co-authored with Bert Fraussen.

ABSTRACT

Umbrella associations form a vital link between society and public authorities by representing their members in policymaking processes. A crucial component of this transmissive role is the involvement of members when determining policy positions. In this process, umbrellas have to overcome collective action problems by aggregating the preferences of their members. By focusing on the perspective of umbrella leaders, this paper explores how umbrella groups involve their members when establishing policy positions. The paper relies on qualitative interview data from the leaders of prominent and supranational umbrella organizations active at the EU level. The findings show that while members are generally involved in umbrella affairs, variation in membership heterogeneity and in how members perceive policy issues lead to biased member involvement in position-taking. While group leaders are aware of these dynamics, it raises questions about the representative potential of groups and the legitimacy of their policy claims.

3.1 Introduction

Umbrella organizations are crucial stakeholders in our governance systems. Defined as actors that represent the interests of their member groups (Junk, 2019a), umbrella organizations perform a vital intermediary function in western democracies by connecting societal voices with policymakers (Kohler-Koch, 2009; Kröger, 2018). As a result of their representative nature and often sizable membership, umbrella groups can contribute to an efficient and legitimate policy process, that also eases future policy implementation (Junk, 2019a). Much research at the EU and national level shows that umbrella organizations often enjoy high degrees of access and influence among policymakers (Berkhout et al., 2017; Binderkrantz, Christiansen, & Pedersen, 2015; Junk, 2019a). Rather than going through extensive consultation processes with a multitude of actors, policymakers can save time and money by obtaining information about the position and preferences of key constituencies involved within a given field or industry by talking to specific umbrella groups (Rajwani et al., 2015).

A key assumption behind the democratic and political importance of umbrella groups is that they act in the common interests of their members and accurately represent their views and preferences (Albareda & Braun, 2019; Chapman & Lowndes, 2014; Dunleavy, 1991; Rajwani et al., 2015). This implies that members are heard by the leadership of the organization and involved in decision-making processes. However, the process of engaging members when establishing policy positions is rather complex and often suffers from collective action problems (De Bruycker et al., 2019). Many umbrella groups struggle to establish policy positions that reflect the (different) views of members, and this challenges their ability to fulfil a transmission belt function (Greenwood & Webster, 2000; Kohler-Koch, 2010; Kohler-Koch & Buth, 2013; Kröger, 2018; Rodekamp, 2014). Specifically, the literature on umbrella groups has emphasized the lowest common denominator problem as one of the main collective action challenges these organizations face (Greenwood & Webster, 2000; Kohler-Koch & Buth, 2013; Kröger, 2018). This problem reflects the tensions that umbrella confront when seeking to represent the preferences of all their members while being politically relevant and therefore take into account demands and preferences of policymakers. In this complicated balancing exercise, umbrella leaders are central actors, as they can stimulate collective action among the members and steer towards policy positions that avoid ‘politics of the lowest common denominator’ (Rodekamp, 2014, p. 188). This is a crucial organizational and political task.

This paper takes the perspective of the leaders of umbrella organizations, as they have a critical role in making ‘choices about who to represent and how to represent them’ (Han, Andrews, Ganz, Baggetta, & Lim, 2011, p. 54). Despite the increasing attention to the internal governance and structures of umbrellas and interest groups (see for instance, Barakso & Schaffner, 2008; Halpin & Fraussen, 2017b; Halpin et al., 2018; Kohler-Koch & Buth, 2013; Kröger, 2018; Rodekamp, 2014), research has provided little insights into

how the umbrella leadership addresses the challenges and reconciles trade-offs related to their representative function. As a result, we only have a limited understanding of the processes through which members are involved in establishing policy positions, and why and how this varies across and within umbrella organizations. To provide more insight into this important question, this paper aims to clarify what happens inside the transmission belt by putting forward the following specific research question: *how and under which circumstances do umbrella groups involve their members in establishing policy positions?*

Providing insights related to this research question is important for public administration scholars and practitioners alike. Our current governance systems are designed to promote an active engagement of external stakeholders, and public officials often consider umbrella group as key intermediary actors as they provide relevant political and technical information that increases the legitimacy of decision-making processes. As public officials seek guidance from umbrellas' policy input, it is essential to assess the democratic nature of umbrellas in the process of establishing policy positions. More generally, insights into these internal dynamics are imperative for assessing the contribution of umbrella groups to effective and legitimate public governance.

The next section of the paper discusses collective action problems of politically active umbrellas and highlights the importance of two factors that shape member involvement in position-taking processes: membership heterogeneity and issue features as perceived by the members of the umbrella. Empirically, the paper relies on qualitative information from in-depth interviews with the leadership of supranational umbrella organizations that are regarded as prominent among EU public officials. The analysis shows the relevance of membership heterogeneity, particularly the unequal level of resources among members, and issue-level features – i.e., whether issues are perceived as controversial or particularistic among the membership-base – in the process of member involvement for establishing policy positions. The last section of the paper discusses the implications of our findings from a governance perspective and highlight avenues for future research.

3.2 Establishing policy positions through member involvement

A key collective action challenge umbrellas need to address when establishing policy positions involves aggregating and representing the preferences of their members in a way that their messages resonate with policymakers (De Bruycker et al., 2019). This tension is related to the idea of functioning as a transmission belt that connects members with policymakers, thus balancing the logics of membership and influence (Schmitter & Streeck, 1999). On the one hand, umbrellas exist thanks to their members and their core function is to serve their interests, yet, on the other hand, policymakers want clear and relevant policy input from umbrella groups. While being attentive to members' demands emphasizes the involvement, inclusion and representation of the different voices within the umbrella, seeking access and influence stresses values such as efficiency and

control over members, which may collide with member involvement and hamper the representative capacity of umbrellas (Berkhout et al., 2017; van der Pijl & Sminia, 2004). Consequently, as noted by Beger (2002, p. 82), umbrellas have to ‘search for consensus within the [members] and between the [members] and the bureaucracy/legislator’. The process of establishing policy positions represents an important collective action problem that reflects these tensions, trade-offs and difficulties of umbrellas in reconciling member preferences and public officials’ demands.

These sometimes-conflicting dynamics between representing members and being politically active often become manifest in the form of common denominator problems. As noted by Kröger (2018, p. 781) ‘one cannot assume a single well-defined common interest for groups lobbying in the same policy area’. Despite forming part of an umbrella with a predefined collective goal, members might have diverging interests in concrete policy issues, which ‘leads to the collective action problem of having to integrate different views and identify the lowest common denominator’ (Kröger 2018 p. 781). This common denominator position might become a problem for umbrellas that intend to be politically relevant. As succinctly posed by Greenwood and Webster (2000, p. 64), some EU business associations ‘are economic giants but political dwarfs, partly as a result of the inability of their associations to go beyond lowest common denominator positions.’ The common denominator idea implies that all the voices within an umbrella are heard and represented through the umbrella, at least to a certain extent. Yet, it can also lead to watered down and rather conservative policy positions that are less relevant for policymakers developing new legislations (Greenwood & Webster, 2000; Kröger, 2018).

Umbrella leaders play an important role in reconciling the (different) interests and views of members with the preferences and demands from policymakers (Salisbury, 1969; Walker, 1983). In fact, the main role of the leaders is to establish policy positions and interact with policymakers, a task that might distance them from their membership-base (Holyoke, 2013, p. 287). To further explore how umbrellas deal with these dynamics, this paper takes the perspective of the leaders and focuses on the processes they put in place to resolve collective action problems resulting from two distinct yet interrelated factors that have been widely acknowledged in the literature, yet not taken into account to specifically assess the varying degree of member involvement in position-taking processes: membership heterogeneity and policy issue features as perceived by the membership-base.

3.3 Membership heterogeneity and policy issue features

Previous research focused on collective action problems of interest groups and the challenge of identifying common denominators (or overcoming outcomes that reflect the lowest common denominator) has identified two elements that strongly shape how members are involved in the establishment of policy positions: the internal heterogeneity of the group and the specific features of the policy issue under discussion.

Firstly, the internal heterogeneity across members in umbrella groups has been related to the presence of collective action problems (De Bruycker et al., 2019; Holyoke, 2013; Offe & Wiesenenthal, 1980; Olson, 1965; Ostrom, 1998). Internal heterogeneity implies that the members within the umbrella differ in terms of resources, preferences, organizational forms and policy fields or industries. Groups with heterogeneous membership bases face more difficulties when reaching common positions that go beyond the lowest common denominator (Berkhout, 2013; De Bruycker et al., 2019; Greenwood & Webster, 2000; Kröger, 2018). Internal heterogeneity makes it more difficult to formulate common positions because members lack (or have to a lesser extent) a 'notion of shared collective identities and mutual obligations of solidarity' (Offe & Wiesenenthal, 1980, p. 81). Umbrella members often view the organization as a 'vehicle that serves to improve their self-interests' (De Bruycker et al., 2019, p. 301), and when the membership-base is heterogeneous it is less likely that the 'self-interests' will overlap across members, which hampers collective action. As a consequence, umbrella groups with heterogeneous membership-base, require internal mechanisms and leaders that resolve the sometimes-conflicting interests among members and produce politically relevant policy positions. For instance, recent work suggests that more heterogeneous membership base often leads to more professionalized organizational structures, characterized by limited involvement of members (Albareda, 2018). However, the exact role of the leaders and the processes they follow to formulate policy positions while involving members and reconciling interests, has remained understudied.

The second dimension that shapes involvement of members in the establishment of policy positions concerns policy issue features. The severity of the collective action problems that umbrella groups experience depends strongly on the nature of the policy issue on which they seek to mobilize politically. Issue-level features have been extensively analyzed when studying mobilization, strategies, access and influence of interest groups and umbrellas (Bernhagen et al., 2015; Beyers, Dür, & Wonka, 2018; Hojnacki, 1997; Klüver et al., 2015). Previous research also demonstrates that issues are differently perceived by members and consequently affect the internal dynamics and processes of umbrella organizations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Beyers, 2008; De Bruycker et al., 2019; Rasmussen, 2015; Smith, 2000; Strolovitch, 2006, 2007). The nature of the policy issue may have different implications for umbrella members, that is, reaching common positions within umbrellas is presumably linked to the effects that policy issues will have on the membership base of the umbrella. As noted by Greenwood and Webster (2000, p. 74), 'organizations tend to pre-select agendas so as to concentrate on a small number of specialized issues that they think will interest their members' (see also, Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). That is, umbrellas try to avoid conflict among their members and focus on issues where they can easily agree, a behavior that relates to niche seeking strategies and the tendency to specialize on concrete policy issues and sectors. However, this is not always possible and organizational members of umbrella groups may have different policy positions due to their diverging

interests on policy issues (Beyers, 2008; Kröger, 2018; Rasmussen, 2015; Smith, 2000). As a consequence, the level of involvement is likely to be affected by the degree to which members have a stake on the issue under discussion (Strolovitch, 2006, 2007), yet it is not clear how umbrella leaders deal with different types of policy issues when establishing policy positions.

In summary, umbrella leaders need to deal with internal tensions and challenges to overcome collective action problems related to the involvement of members when formulating policy positions. Previous work has highlighted both membership heterogeneity and issue features as factors that are likely to shape this process. In the remainder of this paper, we examine to what extent and how these two dimensions shape the involvement of members in the establishment of policy positions. The next section presents the data and approach implemented to explore this fundamental question about the representative capacity of umbrellas.

3.4 Research design

We explore how umbrellas involve their members when establishing policy positions with qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with the organizational and political leadership of thirty-two supranational umbrella groups. An exploratory approach relying on in-depth interviews is highly suitable considering our central research question and the scarcity of previous work on this particular topic. Moreover, the flexible approach of qualitative methods enables us to continually adjust to the emerging findings in the process of data collection and data analysis, and thus report results that might have not been envisioned (Boeije, 2009, p. 32). While we expect member heterogeneity and policy issue features to play an important role in how members are involved in position taking processes, we are also sensitive for emergent insights related to other concepts. Therefore, our approach is suitable for developing and refining theory about the varying degree of member involvement in umbrellas.

3.4.1 Case selection and sampling

The cases included are purposively selected because they represent a theoretically interesting exemplar of a phenomenon of interest, namely how the member organizations of umbrella groups are involved in establishing policy positions (Boeije, 2009; Nowell & Albercht, 2018). More specifically, we study supranational umbrella organizations mobilized at the EU level, contributing to an emergent stream of research in this field with a similar focus (Kröger, 2018; Rodekamp, 2014). On the one hand, umbrella groups mobilized at the EU level can be ‘considered a most likely case for interest groups to experience collective action problems related to both organizational formation and policy mobilization’ (De Bruycker et al. 2019). On the other hand, umbrella groups at the EU level have political incentives to engage with their membership base as this has been a long-lasting demand of

the EU institutions (European Commission, 2001, 2002; Kröger, 2014). These opposing incentives and the scarcity of research on how umbrella groups and their leaders manage these challenges (but see, De Bruycker et al., 2019) makes the study of supranational umbrellas active at the EU level highly relevant.

The umbrellas included in the study have organizations or associations as formal members¹⁸ and have been mentioned in an interview with public officials of the Commission as key non-state stakeholders when formulating and developing EU regulations and directives (see Rodekamp, 2014 for a similar approach in selecting cases).¹⁹ Therefore, we applied a purposive sampling strategy designed to select prominent umbrella groups – that are on-top of Commission officials’ mind when asked about the stakeholders that were key when working on a particular policy issue (Halpin & Fraussen, 2017a). We selected prominent umbrellas to ensure that groups are closely involved in policymaking, and thus often face the issue of having to engage members and contributing to the policymaking process. In addition, assessing how these organizations involve their members is normatively important as it unveils the representative nature of those umbrellas that EU officials perceive as the most relevant interlocutors when formulating policy proposals.

Table A1 in Appendix to Chapter III presents an overview of the main features of the umbrellas interviewed. It is important to highlight that the cases include vary in terms of group type, 23 of them (i.e., 71%) are economic organizations, such as the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations, while 9 (i.e., 29%) are citizen groups, as the European Patients’ Forum.²⁰ Moreover, there is variation in terms of the members represented by the umbrellas: 37% of the cases include individual organizations (e.g., Transport & Environment); 47% of them represent associations (e.g., European Banking Federation); and 16% of the cases have both individual organizations and associations (e.g., European Public Health Alliance). Moreover, the organizations included also vary in terms of size (ranging from 7 to 93 organizational members) and age (from 7 to 82 years of existence).

3.4.2 Interview data

The thirty-two interviews were conducted between March and December 2019. The interviewees are experienced representatives (organizational and political leadership) of the umbrellas included in the study. More specifically, the interviewees occupied the following positions within the organization at the time of the interview: president, (executive) director, secretary general or similar (n=12); policy coordinator, policy advisor, director of policy or similar (n=9); team leader or director of group’s unit (n=11). On average, interviewees have worked in the organization they represent for 10 years.

To obtain information about how leaders generally involve members in establishing policy positions, trained interviewers relied on a semi-structured questionnaire, and made use of probing questions to explore all potential explanatory factors related to member

involvement in position taking. More specifically, the interviews with leaders of umbrellas consisted of 20 questions about the internal mechanisms to involve members, the different processes they follow when deciding and establishing policy positions, and the challenges and trade-offs they face as membership-based organization that frequently engage with policymakers at the EU level.

The duration of individual interviews was 30 to 60 minutes. To provide a thick description of the mechanisms that generate varying degrees of member involvement, we combine textual interview data with quantitative data from several closed questions as well as data retrieved from the groups' statutes and websites. All the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The transcripts represent the basic linguistic corpus to engage in qualitative analysis with Atlas.ti, a software package to facilitate data managements and analyses.

The interview transcripts were analyzed and coded by the authors through an iterative process. A first step in the coding process was to select those passages where interviewees reflected on the involvement of members during the establishment of policy positions. This overarching code served to obtain a general perspective of how umbrella leaders involve members in the process of establishing policy positions, and constitutes the first descriptive part of the findings. To conduct a more detailed analyses of how umbrellas involve members, we rely on the two dimensions presented in the theoretical section (i.e., membership heterogeneity and issue features) which serve as sensitizing concepts. All the relevant quotes in the transcripts were coded and subsequently confronted with the sensitizing concepts in order to assess if the processes of involving members when establishing policy positions could be related to any of the two dimensions. Ultimately, our findings present the reflections of the interviewees on three broad codes that have been related to the two sensitizing concepts. Regarding member heterogeneity, the code that was more frequently mentioned and discussed among interviewees is the 'unequal resources among members'.²¹ As for issue features, two codes have been related to it as elements that affect how umbrellas involve members: the extent to which issues are controversial among members (i.e., controversial issues), and the level of specificity of the issues (i.e., particularistic issues).

3.5 Findings

A first important observation is that all interviewees acknowledge that their organizations involve their members to some extent in the process of establishing policy positions. In only 6 cases (19%) members were little or somewhat involved, whereas in 26 umbrellas (81%) members were considerably or extremely involved (see Table A1 in Appendix to Chapter III). That means that none of the umbrellas included in the study had 'no membership involvement' when establishing policy positions. More importantly, according to the leaders' general perspective, the large majority of the umbrellas have a very active

membership base when it comes to establishing policy positions (see Rodekamp, 2014 for similar findings). Additionally, most of the group leaders note that their members have similar preferences,²² which facilitates reaching common positions without having to resolve major difficulties. In that regard, the outspoken tension within umbrellas to reach common positions is not as prevalent as previous studies may have implied.

At a general level, respondents note that for the majority of the policy issues, members share similar positions and there are no major disagreements.²³ Consequently, it is relatively easy for groups' leaders to identify and establish policy positions. A common practice when doing so is that leaders draft a policy position based on their knowledge and previous experiences. Subsequently, they will reach out to all the members in the organization to get their input on policy positions.²⁴ Moreover, as reflected in the quote below, the leaders have an important role in warranting an agreement among the members by taking into account all the perspectives and ensuring that all members will agree on the position.

We [the leadership] do a first draft of a position paper and then we consult on it [with members], and it may look very different in the end. In the end, we do not do anything without the explicit consensus of our members. (...) But, if we [the leaders] do our homework by looking at policy issues where there are common challenges shared by members, then quite often we get consensus from members, by concentrating on where the common factor is. (Respondent#36)

Importantly, the majority of our respondents highlight that the involvement of members is very much dependent on the resources that members have available and how members perceive the policy issues under discussion. In the next section, we focus on these two elements and their relationship for members involvement in the process of establishing policy positions.

3.5.1 Membership heterogeneity: Unequal resources among members

The majority of respondents indicated that unequal resources among members had a big impact on the involvement of members in establishing policy positions.²⁵ Aligned with previous research in the field, group leaders clarified how poorly endowed members are less frequently involved in establishing policy positions, compared to more resourceful members (see for instance Barnett, 2013; Kröger, 2018).

Those [members] that can afford to monitor all those issues, then they can get actively involved in all or many of the policy positions. And this might be around 30 to 40% of our members. These are mostly the largest or more resourceful [members]. (Respondent#32)

Very small companies, sometimes with less than 20 persons, don't have time to take care of [EU affairs]. They are fighting for the daily income. So, they basically delegate all the political activities to us. (Respondent#34)

We have very resourceful members who have the resources to be actively involved, and also have very small members who just don't have the capacity to come to a workshop or whatever. (Respondent#12)

Even if umbrellas have relevant organizational structures that facilitate member involvement, that does not guarantee that all the members will get equally involved. In that regard, the leaders emphasize that they are neutral receivers of members' information and, as such, they try to ensure that groups' positions are not dominated by large members.

[Our] members try to influence us as well. But we [the leadership] try to act as a neutral receiver in a way, and also ensure that our positions are not dominated by certain [members]. (Respondent#1)

Despite presenting themselves as neutral receivers, the interviewees also state that they cannot do much about the internal participation bias, beyond eventually reaching out to specific members.

I am not going to babysit anybody. If [members] do not raise any issue [related to policy positions], then I will not do anything about it. Unless that I am aware of something. Then of course I would reach out to the members and check. But if I'm not aware and I'm not made aware, then I cannot do anything. (Respondent#33)

If we have a new position coming or we realized that we need to have a new position then we will email all of our members through our members email list and then kind of informing them how the process will go. Then, no one can claim that they didn't receive it. Then it's their own problem if they didn't participate. (Respondent#24)

Overall, this unequal level of involvement has clear implications for the representative capacity of umbrellas. The non-participation of less resourceful members might generate internal biases toward the preferences of more resourceful members. In other words, lowest common denominator positions might be exclusively based on input from resourceful organizations, neglecting the preferences of less resourceful organizations. The following quote illustrates this:

If there is any member that maybe has more influence [when internally establishing policy positions], I think this will be due to their ability to be more present, and give more information, and provide more examples. By bringing more food to the table. So that's very normal. And that's not a thing that we resist. (...) Members that have more manpower, more examples to give, more technical abilities, and more technical expertise will be contributing more. (Respondent#04)

An additional important question is how are members involved in establishing policy positions in the three umbrellas where respondents indicated that their members had 'very similar resources'. According to these respondents, the limited number of organizations within the umbrella is crucial to ensure that their members are similarly endowed and that thus that are equally involved (see also, Rodekamp, 2014, p. 189). In that regard, these three cases only have 7, 12 and 16 members, a number which is significantly below the 36 members that the umbrellas studied have on average (see Table A1 in Appendix to Chapter III). Paraphrasing the leader of one of these organizations, the limited number of similar members facilitates their intensive involvement in every policy process (Respondent#22).

3.5.2 Issue-level features: Controversial and particularistic issues

In addition to unequal resources among members, respondents acknowledge that member involvement depends very much on the relevance of the topic in the eyes of individual members. Even though many umbrellas indicate that members are actively involved in establishing policy positions and that common positions are easily reached, almost all interviewees also highlight that, in fact, the extent to which member are involved in establishing policy positions depends on the issue at stake and its importance to their members. Specifically, twenty-four interviewees explicitly state that member involvement and the process of establishing policy decisions is contingent on the issue that is being discussed. Our inductive approach to the analysis of issue-level features enabled us to gain more insight into this "issue contingency", and distinguish two types of issues that directly affect how leaders involve members in the process of establishing policy positions: controversial and particularistic policy issues.

3.5.2.1 Controversial issues

Umbrella leaders note that in some instances different factions of members have high stakes and divisive positions, which leads to higher levels of member involvement and generates collective actions problems. As discussed above, controversial issues are generally the exception among the umbrellas examined here, as their members tend to have rather similar preferences. However, in some policy issues these preferences are not aligned and conflicts between members may arise. While the occurrence of controversial issues is rare, they are difficult to resolve and thus require work and time from the umbrella leadership.

As noted by one interviewee, in “85% of the cases we have a very easy consensus, but 15% of the policy issues we discuss are difficult or very difficult, they take our time and energy” (Respondent#25).

The extent to which members have different and conflicting perspectives on policy issues leads to a more active involvement from members seeking to protect their interests and, importantly, it sometimes impedes reaching common positions. Controversial issues lead to collective action problems because they generate winners and losers within the membership of the umbrella organization. They can also affect the functioning or even the identity of organizational members. In this case, members with a stake are very involved to make sure that the umbrella does not communicate positions that go against their interests. On these issues, the role of the leadership is critical, as they need to reconcile the diverging positions of member organizations.

When there is a controversial issue in a way then [members] are more involved than if everyone is aligned from the start, then it's probably easier [to reach common positions] and members are not as involved” (Respondent#13).

Sometimes [reaching policy positions] is extremely easy, sometimes if it's a controversial topic, it can take a year. Okay, it really depends on the issue. For instance, a very easy one was the position on [policy X] (...). A hard one that we're finding now is on [policy Y]. Here the problem is our members have different opinions. And it is controversial. (Respondent#10)

When you have a policy issue that puts members of a particular country or a group of countries into a disadvantaged position [in comparison to members in other countries], then members are more involved and it is more difficult to reach positions. (Respondent#33)

Reaching a common position might be particularly problematic in controversial issues since “[members] are not going to give up their fundamental interests” (Respondent#26); or, as noted by another respondent “any discussion that involves basic principles has the potential to become very difficult to come to an agreement” (Respondent#27). Consequently, umbrella leaders have the challenging task of trying to reconcile opposing interests among their membership. This is a very delicate balancing exercise, as a lack of consensus might lead to dropping the issue of the political agenda of the group, or some members leaving the organization because the established policy position goes against their interests and preferences.

3.5.2.2 Particularistic issues

Interviewees also highlight that many issues are rather narrow and only attract the attention of a minority of members who tend to share similar preferences and positions. In this case, a subset of members that are knowledgeable and affected by the policy issue at stake is actively involved in the process of establishing policy positions. As noted by one respondent “generally speaking I would say the members that are affected by a particular issue would be very involved” (*Respondent#29*). But the process of involving members is not always the same across umbrellas.

We identify two mechanisms through which this involvement takes place. The first one is a more formalized way to involve a subset of members with a stake on the issue. Umbrellas establish a division of work in formal working groups or committees that gather members with a particular interest in certain policy domains or topics. These groups are responsible of discussing the policy issue and come up with a policy position (normally based on consensus). Generally, the position of the working groups will be the one adopted by the organization, sometimes after the approval of the executive bodies of the organizations, yet without the specific authorization of the whole membership base. As illustrated below:

Let's say that in technical policies the relevant working group will work out policy positions, which will then come to me specifically. Yeah, and I will run it by the executive committee and/or the steering group which validates the position. (Respondent#04)

So, [policy positions] are drafted and agreed at the working group level. Then, depending on the topic, it may or may not need approval at the executive committee and the board. It's not always the case (...) only for the more political issues. (Respondent#33)

The second mechanism is more informal and promoted either by the leaders or the members themselves. That is, member involvement is often induced by the leadership of the organization, who actively reach out to those members that will be affected by a concrete policy issue or that are knowledgeable about the topic and thus can provide valuable policy expertise.

[Member involvement in establishing policy positions] really depends on who is going to be impacted by the policy. If the policy is about X, we involve members working on X to have the first draft'. (Respondent#10)

(...) we're not going to send [a policy position] around to the entire membership if most of them find it irrelevant. You don't want to spam them either. We're working

on so many things at the same time. (...) So, we try to only communicate with those that we think might be interested in it. (Respondent#35)

However, members also self-select which battles are worth fighting and strategically decide when to engage in establishing policy positions. Importantly, this remains a rather top-down approach, as it is not the members who actively raise policy issues to the leadership. Instead, the leadership identifies an issue and communicates with the whole membership-base, yet only a subset responds. One group leader explicitly acknowledged this dynamic:

We try to involve members all the time (...), but in the end of the day it is about self-selection and what matters is whether the policy is relevant for their work (...) So, we have members who focus on issue "A" for instance. On this issue, they are extremely involved, but they are not at all involved in anything related to policy issues "Y" and "Z". (Respondent#26)

In these rather informal procedures, the leadership intends to involve the whole membership base when approving the final decision. That is, once the initial policy position is agreed among a subset of members that have a direct stake on the topic, this position is shared with the rest of the group for approval:

(...) we normally propose a position, you know, it would say a smaller group normally proposes a position, and reaches out to the broader membership to see if we can get them on board. (Respondent#13).

3.6 Discussion

At a general level, we observe that umbrella groups included in the study actively involve their members in establishing policy positions. Aligned with previous research, we observe that leaders of supranational umbrellas have an important intermediary role (Beger, 2002; Rodekamp, 2014). Typically, the leadership drafts initial positions to subsequently reach out to members for input in establishing consensual positions. As a consequence, umbrella leaders have a central role in defining their members' interests at the EU level since, as noted by Barber (1950, p. 496), 'constituents may not always be sure about their interests and need help with developing them' (see also, Rodekamp, 2014, p. 188). Generally, umbrellas leaders do not experience significant challenges when establishing policy positions. In that regard, leaders might be strategically selecting policy issues on which the members do not have different or conflicting positions and where easy consensus can be reached (Greenwood & Webster, 2000). Another explanation related to this 'easy consensus' is that leaders not only consider an unanimous support for a position as sign of consensus, but

also conclude that members are largely in agreement when there is no objection (i.e., when members abstain or do not participate) (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, p. 124).

The interview data also shows the relevance of the two dimensions presented in the theoretical section and explored in the analysis as relevant factors affecting the unequal involvement of members in the process of establishing policy positions. First, interviewees note that more resourceful members tend to dominate decision-making processes because they are more actively involved. Aligned with previous research, umbrellas are often dominated by those resourceful members that can define their policy preferences and provide relevant information and expertise (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Barnett, 2013; Johansson & Lee, 2014; Kröger, 2018; Salisbury, 1969; Walker, 1983). Ultimately, that means that power within an umbrella can be taken over by those who can constantly commit themselves, and the others will fall behind (Alter, 1998, p. 269; Barnett, 2013). Importantly, while having members with different preferences can lead to important collective action problems (Kröger, 2018), unequal resources among members do not seem to generate similar concerns among the umbrella leadership.

Second, our findings indicate that the process of involving members when establishing policy positions is contingent on the type of policy issue under discussion. Controversial issues imply that members have high stakes and hold divisive positions on the issue (see also Smith 2000). In this type of issues, the leadership engages in discussion with all the members that have a stake and tries to reconcile different positions. We observe that establishing policy positions is particularly challenging when umbrellas deal with internally controversial issues that have different implications for subsets of members (De Bruycker et al., 2019; Kröger, 2018). In these cases, the involvement of members increases as they see their interests threatened by the preferences of other organizational members. The leaders' challenge is then to go beyond lowest common denominator positions and remain politically active. It is important to mention that, according to the leader's perspective, controversial issues are the exception rather than the rule. Because these issues attract a lot of attention from members and require intensive work and a lot of time from the leaders, they are also the most prominent ones. However, our findings seem to indicate that umbrellas often circumvent collective action and common denominator problems by either paying attention to most resourceful members (as shown above) or by focusing on narrow or particularistic issues (as presented below).

Particularistic issues, those that only affect a minority or subset of members with high stakes and knowledge on the issue, have been highlighted before as an element affecting member involvement in position-taking processes (see, Smith, 2000; Strolavitch, 2007). In particularistic issues, the leadership (either directly or indirectly) targets a subset of members with an interest in the policy issue. Similarly to previous investigations, we find that members are less active and engaged at the umbrella level when the issue under discussion does not fall into one of the policy areas in which they have expertise and a direct

stake (Rodekamp, 2014). This observation is also related to the increasing specialization and professionalization of groups (for a discussion see Maloney, 2015), who seek to supply technically sound information to policymakers. By exclusively involving members with high expertise and a direct stake in an issue, umbrella groups may see their encompassing representative function damaged, but they are more able to supply specialized knowledge in a timely manner. In addition, through this process, the leaders by-pass the consensus-reaching procedure that normally generates collective action problems leading to lowest common denominator policies. Umbrellas, therefore, are being accommodated to the demands of public officials in need of timely and specialized policy input.

3.7 Conclusion

This paper explores the process of involving members in umbrella groups when establishing policy positions. Relying on qualitative interviews with organizational and political leaders of supranational and prominent umbrellas active at the EU level, we demonstrate that while members are generally involved in umbrella affairs, variation in membership heterogeneity and issue-level features lead to biased participation of members when establishing policy position. By paying particular attention to membership heterogeneity and issue-level features this paper lays a groundwork for future research studying member involvement in position-taking processes of umbrellas and interest groups more generally. More specifically, we underline the relevance of unequal resources among members and issue-level factors to study the internal processes of umbrellas (and membership-based interest groups). Whereas unequal resources among members has been previously acknowledged as a relevant factor affecting interest groups' internal dynamics, policy issue level features have been mostly used to study interest groups' mobilization, strategies and influence, yet, they are also found to be crucial to understand how groups function and how representative their policy positions are.

Because the main research question has received limited scholarly attention, we opted for an in-depth qualitative approach. In that regard, further research is needed to assess whether the findings apply to other types of umbrellas and groups that (1) are not mobilized at the EU-level (2) have individuals as members and (3) are not considered as prominent organizations by public officials. Furthermore, our focus on the leadership of umbrellas needs to be complemented in future work through the inclusion of the perspective of the members that are unequally involved in establishing policy position.

As discussed in the introduction, policymakers value umbrella groups because of their intermediary role and their representative potential, however, interview data shows that less resourceful members might be underrepresented in these organizations. It is worth noting that none of the respondents referred to the possibility of selectively engaging certain members by 'providing structural incentives that make participation more attractive to those who are ordinarily less likely to participate in politics' (Fung, 2006,

p. 67). As a consequence of this limited involvement of poorly endowed members the representative potential of umbrella organizations might be affected and biased in favor of more resourceful members. The leaders acknowledge this as a problem that affects member involvement in establishing policy positions, but their rather passive attitude in making sure that all members are equally involved and heard indicates that this is not a major organizational focus.

From a leadership perspective, the strategies followed might be the most logical and pragmatic way to proceed so as to keep the organization running. As stated by Strolovitch (2007, p. 208), 'not every organization can represent every constituent or potential constituent at all times, nor can organization flout the exigencies of organizational maintenance or focus exclusively on disadvantaged subgroups to the exclusion of majorities and advantaged groups'. However, this inability to represent different members equally well may lead to what is known as the representational strain, where 'some interests are better represented than others' (Schnyder, 2016, p. 748 see also Kröger 2018; Rodekamp 2014). In other words, lowest common denominator policy positions might not always be representing all the members, particularly when umbrellas have members with unequal resources and deal with controversial policy issues.

To conclude, this paper shows that even though the members of umbrella organizations are generally involved when establishing policy positions together with the leadership, there is important variation and we cannot always assume that the position of umbrellas is actually representative of the whole membership-base. In that regard, umbrellas still serve as transmission belts between their members and policymakers, but the transmissive system is sometimes flawed and this may hamper the representative role of umbrella groups and their contribution to the legitimacy of our governance systems.

Notes

- 18 As noted in previous research, umbrella organizations do not communicate directly with lay-members, instead they tend to communicate through their direct or first-line members (Johansson & Lee, 2014; Sudbery, 2003; Warleigh, 2001). That is, we study the relationship between umbrella organizations and their immediate members (other membership groups or organizations), as a first step in the connection with their broader constituencies. This first connection is highly relevant because, if the 'top chain of representation is dysfunctional, the links to lower organizational levels are also unlikely to work, as information cannot be channeled further downwards or upwards' (Rodekamp, 2014, p. 25).
- 19 This sampling strategy is embedded within a larger project focused on stakeholder engagement in regulatory governance. The first step of the project was to sample all the regulatory issues passed at the EU-level between 2015-2016 that followed the ordinary legislative procedure and that fall into one of the following policy domains where the EU has exclusive or shared competence with member states: (1) Finance, banking, pensions, securities, insurances; (2) State aids, commercial policies; (3) Health; (4) Sustainability, energy, environment; (5) Transport, telecommunications; (6) Agriculture and fisheries. Commission officials, either senior policy officers or heads or deputy heads of units leading the 64 sampled regulatory issues were formally invited to participate in the research project. In total, we conducted 48 interviews covering 40 of these regulatory issues. Subsequently, we contacted all the umbrella groups mentioned by Commission officials as key actors when developing the 40 regulatory issues. Ultimately, we conducted interviews with 32 out of the 58 umbrellas invited to participate.
- 20 Previous studies have looked at member involvement in either economic (e.g., Greenwood, 2007) or citizen organizations (e.g., Warleigh, 2001), but do not compare them in a single research design (but see Rodekamp 2014). However, the representative mechanisms of different type of groups might differ (Halpin, 2006), and thus it is necessary to account for the nature of the umbrella.
- 21 We also created a code labeled as 'unequal preferences among members', but this has been discarded in the findings due to lack of support in our data. As reported below, most of the umbrellas note that their members have similar preferences.
- 22 Twenty-five out of the thirty-two leaders interview note that their members have "similar" or "very similar preferences".
- 23 Seventeen out of twenty respondents that answered the closed question "in general how easy or difficult it is to establish policy positions among your members", indicated that it was easy or very easy. Yet, as discussed below, this easiness is very much dependent on the issue at stake.
- 24 In fact, there is only one umbrella that described a different perspective in setting policy positions as they emphasized a bottom-up approach where the members brought the policy issues to the umbrella leadership, who had no power to propose or advance policy positions.
- 25 Our quantitative data indicates that twenty-five out of thirty-two umbrellas report that their members have either "very different" or "different" resources, while the seven remaining respondents indicated that the umbrella members had either "similar" or "very similar" resources. Additionally, twenty interviewees explicitly mentioned the unequal resources and capacities among members as a factor that affects their involvement in the process of establishing policy positions.

Chapter IV

Prioritizing Professionals? How the Democratic and Professionalized Nature of Interest Groups Shapes their Degree of Access to EU Officials

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ABSTRACT

Interest groups are key intermediary actors between civil society and public officials. The EU has long emphasized the importance of interacting with representative groups that involve their members. Additionally, there is an increasing trend towards the professionalization of groups that invest in organizational capacities to efficiently provide policy expertise. Both member involvement and organizational capacity are crucial features for groups to function as transmission belts that aggregate and transfer the preferences of their members to public officials, thus reinforcing the legitimacy and efficiency of governance systems. Yet, not all groups have these organizational attributes. This paper quantitatively examines the effects of interest groups' investment in member involvement and organizational capacity on the level of access to EU Commission officials. The results indicate that member involvement does not pay-off in terms of higher levels of access. In contrast, groups with high organizational capacities have more meetings with Commission officials.

4.1 Introduction

Interest groups are considered key intermediary organizations that transmit the demands of their constituencies to public officials (Kohler-Koch, 2010; Rasmussen et al., 2014). To truly function as transmission belts, interest groups should be able to involve their members as well as have the organizational capacity to ensure an efficient articulation of policy input to public officials. Transmission belts, interest groups characterized by these two abilities, are believed to be better suited to contribute to legitimate and efficient governance systems (Kohler-Koch & Buth, 2013; Saurugger, 2008). This is particularly relevant for the European Union. Due to its democratic deficit and its limited resources, the European Commission is in need of representative and organizationally capable groups that can efficiently provide valuable policy input, thus fostering input and output legitimacy (European Commission, 2001, 2002, 2017, p. 380). However, the dual function of membership involvement and organizational capacity is mostly assumed or taken as a normative point of view, rather than being empirically tested. The literature tends to obscure such central organizational functions by relying on proxies such as group type, which cannot be equaled to the actual capacity of groups to connect members with public officials (Baggetta & Madsen, 2018; Binderkrantz, 2009; Klüver & Saurugger, 2013).

To address this gap, this paper develops a novel theoretical framework to examine how the ability of groups to involve their members and professionally provide policy input shapes their level of access to public officials of the European Commission. In doing so, this paper examines whether the rhetoric of the Commission, which highly values the representative nature of groups, also translates into higher levels of access for groups that meet these expectations, rather than prioritizing interactions with professionalized groups with more expert-oriented structures. Additionally, the paper unveils whether those groups that overcome the organizational tensions between representing members and professionally meeting demands from public officials (Berkhout et al., 2017; Schmitter & Streeck, 1999), and thus approximate the transmission belt ideal, gain higher levels of access to public officials of the Commission. If interest groups are one of the tools to redress the so-called democratic deficit at the EU level (Kohler-Koch & Buth, 2013; Kröger, 2016), it is necessary to open the black box and examine the effects of involving members and having organizational capacity on the level of access to the Commission.

This paper makes three contributions to the literature. Firstly, it builds upon previous work stressing the relevance of how groups are internally organized and the significant variation in that regard (Baroni, Carroll, Chalmers, Marquez, & Rasmussen, 2014; Fraussen, 2014; Halpin, Fraussen, & Nownes, 2018; Minkoff, Aisenbrey, & Agnone, 2008) by highlighting two critical functions of groups: member involvement for representation and organizational capacity to efficiently provide policy input. Secondly, by examining the effects of having representative and efficient structures on the number of meetings with EU officials, the paper contributes to the literature centered on interest groups' *level of access*

to public officials (Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2015; Fraussen et al., 2015; Grömping & Halpin, 2019; Rasmussen & Gross, 2015; Weiler, Eichenberger, Mach, & Varone, 2019). Thirdly, the paper provides an evaluation of the democratic potential of policy insider groups, which is crucial to assess how governance systems function. That is, the paper moves forward the debate on interest group bias by exploring whether membership groups that are more able to represent their constituency in an efficient and professional way gain more access to EU officials.

The paper relies on survey data from 196 groups with access to the Commission and that responded to the INTEREURO Interest Group Survey (Bernhagen et al., 2016; Beyers et al., 2016). The results indicate that the organizational capacity to efficiently generate and provide policy input matters for gaining higher levels of access to Commission officials. In contrast, investing in democratic structures does not seem to result in higher levels of access. Lastly, investing in both organizational dimensions, and thus functioning as a transmission belt, does not relate to higher levels of access. These findings and their important implications for the functioning of the European Commission and the democratic character of the EU are further discussed in the final section.

4.2 Explaining degree of access through an organizational approach

This paper focuses on interest groups *with* access – which is conceptualized as an exchange mechanism whereby groups offer resources to public officials in exchange for meetings (Binderkrantz & Pedersen, 2017; Halpin & Fraussen, 2017a). By focusing on ‘insider’ organizations, the paper scrutinizes an under-researched yet important aspect of interest groups – public officials’ interaction, namely the organizational factors that explain the degree of access within the set of groups that (regularly) interact with public officials (Fraussen et al., 2015). As posed by Maloney et al. (1994, p. 25) ‘access merely leads to consultation, while privileged access leads to bargaining and negotiation.’ More importantly, among those groups with (regular) access to public officials, few manage to achieve a privileged status by securing and frequently getting direct access to public officials, while the large majority occupy a peripheral insider position (Maloney et al., 1994, p. 17). Grossmann (2012, pp. 95–96) also highlights the importance of studying ‘insider’ organizations by stating that ‘if 5 percent of organizations account for half of all participation, for example, researchers must cover that 5 percent to understand the dynamics of the advocacy groups that are involved in policymaking.’ In other words, it is important to examine why some groups seldom meet with public officials, while others gain frequent access.

Previous research focusing on the level of access of interest groups have found that economic groups enjoy more access in administrative venues than citizen groups (Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2015; Fraussen et al., 2015; Weiler et al., 2019). Rasmussen and Gross (2015, p. 358) also show that specialist groups have higher levels of access to advisory groups of the EU than diffused interest groups. While focusing on interest

business associations, Kohler-Koch et al. (2017) find that representativeness (in terms of membership density) favors higher degrees of groups' reported access to the Commission and the European Parliament. Similarly, a recent research shows that the European representativeness and the organizational structure of European associations are related with access to administrative and political officials of the EU (Albareda & Braun, 2019). Lastly, groups that invest more in member engagement receive positive benefits by way of a higher degree of access in the legislative arena (Grömping & Halpin, 2019) and are more likely to be political insiders (Heylen et al., 2020).

Yet, we still have scant knowledge on whether involving members as well as having professionalized organizational features leads to higher levels of access to Commission officials. There has been little conceptual work on the possible relationship between interest groups' organizational structure, their capacity to function as transmission belts, and the level of access to public officials they enjoy. To address this gap, this study conceptualizes the transmission belt ideal by focusing on the organizational ability of groups to involve members and have organizational capacity, and examines its effects on the level of access to Commission officials.

The conceptualization of transmission belts developed here applies to membership-based interest groups as they are expected to have a representative role that one would not assume – or that is at least more complicated – for non-membership organizations (Schlozman et al., 2015). More specifically, membership-based interest groups are expected to promote a legitimate representation through processes of authorization and accountability between members and representatives. Thus, groups with members require a link to a social constituency that needs to be involved in the development of policy positions (Kröger, 2016, pp. 9–10).

The next sections present a detailed discussion of how the combination of certain organizational attributes contribute to fostering member involvement or organizational capacity and their relationship with level of access. The main expectation is that groups that invest in member involvement and organizational capacity – and approximate the transmission belt ideal – are able to provide a wider set of policy goods and thus are expected to gain higher levels of access to public officials.

4.2.1 Member involvement

Member involvement relates to those organizational features that are aimed at connecting, engaging and interacting with members, while ensuring that the group reflects members' preferences and information. This organizational dimension speaks to the idea of representation capacity, defined as the ability of groups to speak on behalf of their members (Flöthe, 2019b). Groups that intend to foster their intermediate role are expected to have organizational mechanisms that connect them with their membership base. By doing so, they are better prepared to generate clear and authoritative statements of the political

interests of the constituency they represent (Grömping and Halpin 2019, 515). To achieve this, interest groups need to exhibit a governance and decision-making structure that is representative of their members and ensure that their actions reflect the shared interest of their membership-base (Jordan & Maloney, 2007; Kohler-Koch, 2010).

This paper focuses on three elements that have been considered as crucial for member involvement and, thus, for the representative capacity of groups (Albareda, 2018; Berkhout et al., 2017). Firstly, the mere existence of a forum where members and leaders of the group meet is key for member involvement, social integration, and democracy (Hayes, 1986; Jordan & Maloney, 2007, p. 2). The second element revolves around the decision-making system and the capacity of members to determine positions and strategies of the group (Binderkrantz, 2009). In Berry et al.'s (1993) terms, involving members in the decision-making system is about the depth of participation and is expected to ensure an active involvement in the group (see also, Beyers, 2008). Finally, an important element to maintain the connection with the members is the existence of local offices, branches or regional chapters. This feature not only enhances the embeddedness of the group in society (Fraussen et al., 2015, p. 574), it also ensures a smooth communication (and the provision of information) from geographically dispersed members to the group (Fraussen et al., 2015; Skocpol, 2003). In sum, these three factors foster the involvement of members in the group and enhance their democratic nature (Jordan & Maloney, 2007, pp. 9–10).

Interest groups that invest in member involvement are expected to have more access to public officials of the Commission. On the one hand, Commission officials are in need of input legitimacy that can be provided by representative interest groups. In that regard, as clearly posed by Kohler-Koch (2010, p. 101) 'those who want to participate in (EU) policymaking have to prove that they are representative.' The Commission itself has stated that when interest groups want to meet EU officials, 'it must be apparent (1) which interest they represent, and (2) how inclusive that representation is' (European Commission, 2002, p. 17). Similarly, the White Paper on Governance (2001), 'raised the prospect of privileged "extended partnership arrangements" in return for those groups which could provide it with evidence of representativity' (Greenwood, 2007, p. 346; see also Persson & Edholm, 2018, p. 561). According to this EU rhetoric, those groups that have most of the organizational elements linked to member involvement will be more capable of offering input legitimacy and, thus, will have more access to the Commission. On the other hand, following an exchange approach (Bouwen, 2002), public officials are expected to grant higher levels of access to groups investing in member involvement because they are more likely to have political information and implementation capacity. More specifically, through member involvement, groups are better able to understand and represent all members' viewpoints, experiences, and grievances (Flöthe, 2019a; Kohler-Koch, 2010). Moreover, the close-knit relationship between members and the group fosters membership compliance and, thus, implementation capacity (Braun, 2012).

H1: The more an interest group invests in member involvement, the more likely it is that it will gain higher degrees of access to Commission officials.

4.2.2 Organizational capacity

Organizational capacity relates to those organizational elements that enable groups to act in an efficient and professional manner while internally generating expertise-based information. The main assumption related to this understanding of organizational capacity is that effectiveness of interest groups is about their ability to interact with public officials. Alternative approaches to interest groups effectiveness – such as the ability to implement outside lobbying strategies (Maloney et al., 1994) – might require different organizational attributes that are not considered here (see Bryan, 2019 for a discussion on the contingent nature of organizational capacity). However, the conceptualization of organizational capacity developed below allows us to assess the ability of groups to supply timely and detailed responses to public officials with limited resources and under time constraints (Klüver, 2012a; Klüver & Saurugger, 2013; Maloney, 2015). In order to build this organizational capacity, groups need to invest in three key organizational features: autonomy, centralized structures, and the functional differentiation that facilitates the generation of policy expertise (Albareda, 2018; Hanegraaff, van der Ploeg, & Berkhout, 2020, p. 7; Klüver, 2012a).

Autonomy, understood as the delegation of discretionary authority to the group, enhances managerial flexibility and efficiency (Bach, 2014, p. 345). Autonomous groups are supposed to have control over operational activities and, thus, are better equipped to function independently and pursue long-term strategies (Beyers, Eising, & Maloney, 2008; Schmitter & Streeck, 1999) while overcoming the hurdles of collaborative endeavors. Secondly, centralization or hierarchical integration implies the concentration of power on a limited number of top representatives of the group. This feature facilitates the coordination of the different tasks and activities of the group (Christensen et al., 2016). Empowering the top representatives of the organization is part of the managerialist trend that many groups have undergone and that aims to promote effective and efficient structures (Maloney, 2015; Skocpol, 2003). Lastly, functional differentiation refers to the presence of specialized units that generate policy expertise on concrete issues (Hage & Aiken, 1967; Klüver, 2012a). As highlighted by Klüver (2012a, p. 496), groups with functional differentiation are better fitted to monitor the behavior of public officials and to notice the emergence of new policy initiatives at early stages, which enable these groups to develop expert-based information demanded by public officials. In sum, organizational capacity implies that groups are capable of generating policy expertise and efficiently processing and transferring their own resources to public officials.

Groups that invest in organizational capacity are expected to have higher degrees of access to Commission officials. Given the limited time, resources, and capacity of Commis-

sion officials as well as the transaction costs associated with meeting many stakeholders, public officials would rather meet with capable groups that have expertise and that are able to timely respond to policymakers' demands (Klüver, 2012a). On the one hand, expert knowledge and technical information internally generated by specialized units is an important access good particularly for Commission officials who, as legislative agenda-setters and in order to develop effective policies, are in need of expert and technical information (Bouwen, 2002, 2004; De Bruycker, 2016; Greenwood, 2011). In that regard, knowledge and expertise are key sources of Commission (output) legitimacy (Kröger, 2016). On the other hand, as noted by Rasmussen and Toshkov (2013, p. 382), responsiveness of public authorities is not simply about 'giving the public what it wants but also about providing such outputs in a timely fashion.' Accordingly, public officials are expected to favor the interaction with those groups that can efficiently offer valuable information about an issue. Additionally, the emergence of capable organizations can be seen as a response of the lobbying community to EU 'pressure on interest groups to organize themselves coherently to be able to present their demands in a professional and constructive way' (Klüver & Saurugger, 2013, p. 186). Thus, when investing in organizational capacity features, interest groups are expected to gain more frequent meetings with public officials.

H2: The more an interest group invests in organizational capacity, the more likely it is that it will gain higher degrees of access to Commission officials.

4.2.3 Transmission belts

The ability to function as a transmission belt is related to the presence of organizational attributes that on the one hand foster the interaction and engagement with members and on the other hand, promote the efficiency of the group by acting professionally and generating expertise-based information demanded by public officials. The paper contends that groups with an internal structure that approximates the transmission belt ideal fit better than others within the EU context, and thus will gain more access to public officials of the Commission. As noted before, the Commission has repeatedly stated its preferences for interacting with groups that can truly speak on behalf of their constituency (European Commission, 2001, 2002, 2017; Kohler-Koch & Buth, 2013). At the same time, previous investigations demonstrate that the population of groups mobilized at the EU level are becoming highly professionalized, a factor that is also expected to positively influence their ability to gain access to the Commission (Klüver & Saurugger, 2013; Maloney, 2015). In other words, groups that invest in member involvement and organizational capacity are expected to approximate the transmission belt ideal and successfully function as intermediaries between their constituency and public officials, therefore contributing to EU governance systems with input and output legitimacy.

However, having most of the organizational elements of both dimensions may be associated with organizational tensions. Interest groups struggle to combine organizational features that reinforce the democratic nature of groups by involving members, with other features aimed at being efficient and at generating policy expertise (Berkhout et al., 2017; Jordan & Maloney, 2007; Klüver & Saurugger, 2013; Maloney, 2015; Schmitter & Streeck, 1999; Skocpol, 2003). As noted by van der Pijl and Sminia (2004) these two organizational dimensions are in conflict because one follows a bottom-up process that emphasizes the inclusion of all the different voices within the organization whereas the other follows a top-down approach that relies on values such as efficiency and control over members. Functioning as a transmission belt, thus, puts substantial and sometimes contradictory organizational demands on groups (Berkhout et al., 2017). However some groups are able to overcome these tensions and effectively organize themselves as transmission belts (Albareda, 2018). These groups are not only able to provide public officials with input legitimacy, they also function in an efficient and professional manner, which reinforces the output legitimacy of the political process. Hence, groups that invest in both organizational dimensions will have higher levels of access than those that only invest in one of them.

H3a: Interest groups organized as transmission belts are more likely to gain higher degrees of access to Commission officials than those that are not organized as transmission belts.

H3b: The effects of functioning as a transmission belt on the likelihood of gaining more access to the Commission is higher than the one obtained by interest groups investing in either member involvement or organizational capacity.

4.3 Research design

The paper relies on data from the INTEREURO Interest Group Survey,²⁶ a tool designed within the INTEREURO-project to examine organizational characteristics and policy activities of interest groups active at the EU level. The survey was conducted from 9 March to 2 July 2015 and targeted senior leaders of the interest groups (Bernhagen et al., 2016). In total, 2,038 interest organizations were selected from the Transparency Register of the EU, the OECKL Directory.²⁷ To be included in the sample, the organizations had to fulfil three requirements: (1) EU-level interest organizations which could be EU peak associations or national organizations with (2) a presence in Brussels and (3) that show some interest in EU policymaking processes. The organizations included in the sample fit perfectly the purpose of this study because, due to their layered structure, they require to put in place a certain organizational structure that defines the interaction between members. The last section of the paper discusses how the focus on interest groups active

at the EU level may have consequences for the occurrence of our explanatory factors and thus for the generalizability of the results.

Despite the hurdles related to gaining the organizational data of interest groups (Baggetta & Madsen, 2018), 738 groups completed the questionnaire, reaching a response rate of 36.2% (Beyers et al., 2016). To enable the identification of group type (i.e., business vs. non-business groups), only membership-based groups that were accurately categorized are included. Groups that did not provide such information ($n=128$) were excluded from the sample. Additionally, groups without members ($n=48$) have been dropped from the database, leading to 559 interest groups for which survey data is available.

The bottom-up sampling approach used to obtain the sample of groups included in the survey entails an important limitation, namely that it does not represent a perfect match for studies on interest group influence due to the long chain of intermediate steps between mobilization and final policy outcomes (Berkhout et al., 2018). However, this dataset of 559 groups is combined with the ‘Transparency International EU – Integrity Watch’ database of interest groups with access to public officials of the Commission – i.e., Commissioners, their Cabinets, and Director-Generals (European Commission, 2014).²⁸ In total, 196 out of the 559 membership-based groups that responded to the INTEREURO survey had at least one meeting with public officials between December 2014 and October 2017.

4.3.1 Dependent variable: Access to public officials of the European Commission

The hypotheses drawn in the previous section are tested by focusing on the level of access that interest groups obtain to Commission officials. Since the approval of the White Paper on European Governance in 2001, the Commission has been progressively developing ‘one of the most elaborate and ambitious consultative regimes’ (Bunea, 2017, p. 47). At a general level, the consultation regime of the EU aims to promote a balanced involvement and participation of different non-state stakeholders, to reinforce the societal legitimacy of EU institutions, and efficiently and effectively develop legislative proposals by interacting with actors that will be affected and that possess relevant knowledge (European Commission, 2001; Kröger, 2016, p. 27). To do so, the Commission has put in place multiple consultation mechanisms, both open and targeted (European Commission, 2017; Fraussen, Albareda, et al., 2020).

This paper focuses on one specific consultation mechanism, namely direct – face-to-face and often individual – meetings between interest group representatives and public officials of the Commission. Importantly, there is no clear set of rules defining which groups are invited to the meetings studied here (Kröger, 2016, p. 25). However, direct meetings constitute an important form of access as they are expected to have the highest degree of interactivity and involvement between officials and group representatives when compared

to other public and targeted consultation mechanisms (European Commission, 2017, pp. 395–396).

To examine the relationship between degree of access and the presence of key organizational features related to the transmission belt ideal, the paper only includes groups that had at least one meeting with a Commission official between December 2014 and October 2017, and measures the degree of access by the number of meetings they had in this period. By focusing on level of access, this paper intends to capture which organizational dimensions facilitate a repeated interaction with public officials and thus can get a status closer to what has been labelled as ‘core’ insiders (Fraussen et al., 2015). Additionally, this operationalization of the dependent variable accounts for the limited knowledge that public officials may have about interest groups’ organizational structures. It is fair to assume that public officials do not know whether groups invest in member involvement and/or organizational capacity. However, this is probably clarified after the first meeting, and thus, if involving members or having organizational capacity matters, it can be observed with the subsequent meetings between the group and public officials. Despite this focus on groups with access, the analyses also include a robustness section that examines the effects of the explanatory variables on the likelihood of *gaining* access. In this case, the variable is either 0 or 1. This analysis includes the 559 membership-based groups that responded to the INTEREURO survey of which 35% gained access in the specified period.

4.3.2 Explanatory factors: Member involvement, organizational capacity, and transmission belts

Table 4.1 presents the operationalization of the two organizational dimensions. Member involvement is an additive index that includes the following organizational features: interaction among members, decision-making procedure, and the presence of local branches. The first item focuses on the presence or absence of a forum that facilitates the interaction among members or supporters (Hayes, 1986; Jordan & Maloney, 2007). Despite being a restricted operationalization that does not account for the frequency of these meetings or their turnout, the presence of such a forum is considered as a prerequisite to enable the interaction among members and between members and the organization (Jordan & Maloney, 2007, p. 2). The second feature looks at the decision-making procedure and, in particular, at whether members have the capacity to determine the positions and strategies of the group either through consensus or voting mechanisms (Binderkrantz, 2009). This measurement is about the depth of participation of members regarding key factors for the mission and the future of the organization (Berry et al., 1993) and relates to the perceived legitimacy that members confer to the group (Persson, Esaiasson, & Gilljam, 2013). The last item, centers on the presence or absence of local branches that foster the connections between the group and its local/regional constituency (Fraussen et al., 2015; Skocpol,

2003). That is, it looks at the organizational ability of the group to reach out to elementary members spread around a Member State, Europe or even internationally.

Table 4.1. Operationalization of organizational variables

Items	Operationalization
<i>Member involvement: Additive index ranging from 0 to 3</i>	
Interaction among members	0 = Organizations do not have a general assembly or an annual general meeting. 1 = Organizations have a general assembly or an annual general meeting.
Decision-making procedure	0 = Members do not participate in the decision-making processes when establishing positions and defining strategies. 1 = Members participate in the decision-making processes when establishing positions and defining strategies.
Local branches	0 = Organizations do not have local or regional chapters. 1 = Organizations have local or regional chapters.
<i>Organizational capacity: Additive index ranging from 0 to 3</i>	
Autonomy	0 = The senior staff of the organization does not have decision-making power on the budget or on hiring staff. 1 = The senior staff of the organization has decision-making power on the budget and on hiring staff.
Centralization	0 = The apex of the group is not influential when establishing positions and defining strategies. 1 = The apex of the group is influential when establishing positions and defining strategies.
Functional differentiation	0 = Organizations do not have committees for specific tasks. 1 = Organizations have committees for specific tasks.

Organizational capacity is an additive index of three organizational elements: autonomy, centralization, and functional differentiation. Autonomy is measured using a question about whether the group can independently hire their own staff and approve the budget or if, in contrast, both tasks require the approval of the members (either directly or through the board of directors) (Bach, 2014). That is, the focus is on operational autonomy, which in this case indicates whether a group can take human resource management decisions without membership involvement. As noted by Bach (2014, 345), this is a powerful indicator of the ‘degree of [member] interference in the day-to-day management of the [group].’ Centralization is operationalized as a construct that captures whether the apex of the group (i.e. executive director, the chair of the board, and the board of directors) is influential when establishing positions and deciding on advocacy tactics (Christensen et al., 2016). The paper, thus examines *real* authority which is expected to provide a more accurate measurement since some organizations may have decentralized decision-making structures, but, in practice, the power/influence might be concentrated around the apex of the organization (Pugh et al., 1963). Finally, functional differentiation is measured by examining the presence or absence of committees for specific tasks (Hage & Aiken, 1967), which enable the organization to produce expert knowledge in a timely manner (Klüver, 2012a).

The items in each organizational dimension serve to compute two additive multi-dimensional factors (or composites) that range from 0 to 3 (see Berkhout et al., 2017 for a similar approach). In doing so, the paper establishes two composite factors that are formed when ‘individual indicators are compiled into a single index on the basis of an underlying model of the multi-dimensional concept that is being measured’ (Greco, Ishizaka, Tasiou, & Torrissi, 2019). In this case, the (non-weighted) three items included in each factor are conceptually related, but they represent different organizational dimensions, and thus are not statistically correlated (see Table A0 in Appendix to Chapter IV). For more details on the original questions used to operationalize each of the items and the correlation between them, see Appendix to Chapter IV.

The third explanatory variable – i.e., the organizational ability to function as a transmission belt – is operationalized as a binary factor that is coded as 1 when groups score 2 or 3 in both ‘member involvement’ and ‘organizational capacity’. In other words, those interest groups that score highly on both organizational dimensions are coded as a transmission belt. This operationalization follows an organizational configuration approach and considers transmission belts those interest groups that have at least two critical organizational features related to each organizational dimension (for a similar operationalization of the transmission belt factor, see Berkhout et al., 2017, p. 1118). An alternative would be operationalizing this variable as an additive index of the two organizational dimensions, that is, ranging from 0 to 6, but the problem with this approach is that it does not enable us to examine how the presence of both dimensions affects levels of access. Similarly, studying this variable as an interaction effect between the two organizational dimensions would not allow us to disentangle which groups can be categorized as transmission belts.

4.3.3 Control variables

The paper controls for well-established variables that tap into groups’ characteristics and that relate to their capacity to provide different access goods to public officials. The first control is group type. It is included as a dichotomous variable indicating whether groups are business (e.g., European Dairy Association or the International Union of Combined Road-Rail Transport Companies) or non-business (e.g., European Consumer Organisation or the European Federation of Employees in Public Services). Business groups are expected to be better represented in administrative venues such as the Commission (e.g., Fraussen et al., 2015; Kohler-Koch et al., 2017; Weiler et al., 2019). Moreover, recent research has demonstrated that business organizations face more difficulties than citizen groups when establishing policy positions on specific policy issues, which implies that they have a more active involvement of their members (De Bruycker et al., 2019). Related, the correlation matrix in Table A1 in Appendix to Chapter IV shows that business organizations are more likely to approximate the transmission belt ideal, and thus it is important to control for this in the multivariate models.

The second control distinguishes whether organizations are mobilized at a national or supranational level (Bunea, 2014). Aligned with previous studies, the Commission is expected to favor the interaction with groups representing encompassing interests that go beyond their national preferences (Bouwen, 2004; Bunea, 2014). Thirdly, the scope of activity of the group – measured with the number of policy domains or sectors in which the group is involved – is included as a control. Here the distinction is between generalists and niche players, and the formers are expected to have more access to the Commission because they are active in more policy domains. Fourthly, membership diversity is included as a count variable to assess the effect of having a diverse set of members on degree of access. The membership options are: private citizens, firms, local and regional governments, national associations, and European associations.

Organizational age and resources are also included as controls. In line with previous studies, organizational age is expected to have a positive effect on the level of access to public officials since older groups may have more expertise to engage in lobbying and a wider circle of contacts among public officials (Dür & Mateo, 2014; Fraussen et al., 2015). The financial resources of the organizations are measured in terms of full-time equivalents (FTE) and is expected to positively relate with access (Dür & Mateo, 2014; Kröger, 2016, p. 187). Although resources on their own cannot fully explain why groups get engaged in EU politics, they may have an effect on interest groups' abilities to involve their members and develop the necessary organizational capacities to efficiently engage with public officials (Kröger 2016, 188). Yet, as reported in the correlation matrix in Appendix to Chapter IV, the variable resources is not correlated with the explanatory factors, suggesting that 'resources cannot explain why we find different patterns of organizational structures among groups' (Hollman, 2018).

4.4 Analyses and results

Before turning to the regression analyses, this paragraph describes the explanatory variables, as well as the bivariate relationship between them and the dependent variable. Firstly, groups on average invest somewhat more in organizational capacity than in member involvement. More specifically, as shown in Table A2 in Appendix to Chapter IV, groups score 1.486 (S.D. 0.643) and 1.787 (S.D. 0.481) for member involvement and organizational capacity respectively. In addition, 37% of the interest groups in the analysis are organizationally prepared to function as transmission belts. Secondly, regarding the bivariate analysis, the three explanatory variables are positively related to the degree of access interest groups gain to Commission officials. However, as shown in the in the correlation matrix (see Appendix to Chapter IV), the only variable that is significantly related to the degree of access is organizational capacity.

Regarding the multivariate analyses, Table 4.2 presents the results of negative binomial regressions that have as dependent variable the level of access, that is, the number of

meetings with public officials of the Commission. This is an appropriate method because the dependent variable is an over-dispersed count variable that ranges from 1 to 116, with a mean of 8.204, and a standard deviation of 15.431 (Long & Freese, 2014).

Table 4.2. Negative binomial regression: Level of access to Commission officials²⁹

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Membership involvement	-0.010 (0.215)		-0.150 (0.198)		-0.279 (0.331)
Organizational capacity		0.861*** (0.229)	0.869*** (0.228)		0.782*** (0.292)
Transmission belt				0.302 (0.255)	0.214 (0.449)
Group type: Non-business (REF)					
Group type: Business	0.045 (0.249)	-0.223 (0.236)	-0.169 (0.246)	-0.089 (0.250)	-0.157 (0.245)
Org. scale: (Sub)National associations (REF)					
Org. scale: European or International associations	0.7912** (0.378)	0.649* (0.361)	0.690* (0.363)	0.705* (0.376)	0.700* (0.363)
Scope of activity	0.117** (0.046)	0.092** (0.042)	0.095** (0.041)	0.116** (0.046)	0.100** (0.043)
Membership diversity	-0.348*** (0.121)	-0.332*** (0.113)	-0.344*** (0.113)	-0.310** (0.122)	-0.335*** (0.115)
Organizational age	-0.005 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.006)	-0.003 (0.005)
Resources (FTE)	0.009** (0.004)	0.008** (0.003)	0.008*** (0.003)	0.008** (0.004)	0.009*** (0.003)
Constant	1.488** (0.591)	-0.006 (0.624)	0.155 (0.654)	1.258** (0.547)	0.361 (0.785)
N	107	107	107	107	107
Alpha	1.193 (0.163)	1.067 (0.150)	1.060 (0.150)	1.182 (0.162)	1.057 (0.150)
Log likelihood	-329.659	-323.238	-322.954	-329.060	-322.841

* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Vif scores in range from 1.06 to 4.12, suggesting that multicollinearity is not a problem

Firstly, H1 is rejected. Results in Models 1, 3 and 5 indicate that those groups that invest in involving their members via direct contact and decision-making procedures, are not more likely to gain higher levels of access to the Commission. In fact, the predicted number of meetings when groups do not have the organizational features that empower their members is 13.771 (SE: 7.964) and when groups have the three features related to member involvement, this decreases to 5.969 (SE: 2.757).³⁰ This finding contradicts

the rhetoric of the Commission and its request for representative and democratic interest groups (European Commission, 2001, 2002). The non-significant relation may be a consequence of the transaction and coordination costs associated with involving members, which hamper the efficiency of the group and their ability to provide timely and relevant policy input. The null finding also indicates that public officials are not actively reaching out to those groups that are more representative of their membership base.

Models 2, 3 and 5 confirm H2. Groups that have more organizational capacity are more likely to gain more access to public officials of the Commission. The predicted number of meetings with public officials increases from 2.055 (SE: 1.170) when groups do not have any feature related to organizational capacity to 21.463 (SE: 8.552) when they have the three organizational attributes. This finding relates to the preference of EU institutions for developed and professional organizations (Klüver & Saurugger, 2013; Maloney, 2015). Aligned with previous findings, this result shows that investing in efficient and professionalized structures that generate expertise-based information facilitates access to the Commission (Berkhout et al., 2017; Klüver, 2012a). More importantly, this finding underlines the agency of groups when gaining more access to the Commission – organizationally capable groups have a clear advantage in that regard.

Lastly, as depicted in Model 4 and 5, interest groups organized as transmission belts do not have higher levels of access, thus H3a and H3b respectively are rejected. More specifically, the 37% of the interest groups in the analysis that overcome the tensions of balancing member involvement and organizational capacity and hence, that are expected to offer both input legitimacy and efficiency, do not have more access to public officials of the Commission. The predicted number of meetings of groups that are not categorized as transmission belts is 7.927 meetings (SE: 1.835), whereas transmission belts have 9.820 (SE: 3.026). In that regard, being organizationally prepared to function as a transmission belt leads to more meetings, but this difference is not statistically significant. Consequently, the relationship between interest group structure and access is dominated by their investment in organizational capacity, whereas involving members seems to decrease the ability or the attractiveness of groups to gain access to public officials.

Regarding the control variables in Model 5, being a generalist, mobilizing at the EU/international level, and having more resources are positively related to the level of access. In contrast, groups including a more diverse set of actors are less likely to gain higher levels of access. As shown by Kröger (2018), groups with a heterogeneous membership-base face more difficulties to find common ground beyond the lowest common denominator which ultimately might be hampering their ability to be politically active. Another intriguing result is that group type does not matter in any of the models. In contrast to other institutional settings such as Belgium (Fraussen et al., 2015), Denmark (Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2015), and Switzerland (Weiler et al., 2019), results indicate that, in the Commission, being a business organization does not affect the level of access to public

officials. One possible explanation of this null-finding is the time-consuming process of internal consensus formation that business organizations, particularly at the EU level, necessitate to define policy positions (De Bruycker et al., 2019). All in all, the results of the control variables underline the necessity to more accurately unpack the relationship between membership diversity, group type, organizational structure, and access or influence.

4.5 Robustness checks

This paper focuses on explaining the degree of access that interest groups obtain to public officials. However, access can be conceptualized as a two-step process in which first interest groups gain access, and, subsequently, they can have repeated access. This section evaluates the robustness of the results while accounting for those organizations without access. More specifically, Table 4.3 below presents the results of hurdle negative binomial models, a two-step method that first assesses the probability of obtaining the binary outcome, in this case obtaining access or not, and subsequently calculates the effects of the same explanatory factors on the level of access (see Weiler et al. 2019 for a similar approach). This model is appropriate in the case of a sequential decision-making process. Even though the two stages of granting access once and deciding to grant access multiple times are estimated separately, the second stage should be interpreted as conditional on the first stage.

The first step of the model (binary logit), shows that organizational capacity increases the likelihood of gaining access. In contrast, member involvement and functioning as a transmission belt is not related to the probability of gaining access.³¹ That is, the same organizational factors that explain the level of access seem to explain the likelihood of gaining access. Additionally, the second step of the model (zero-truncated negative binomial) confirm the results presented in Table 4.2. The only differences are found in the significance levels of some control variables. More specifically, the second step of hurdle models show that only organizational scale and resources are significantly related to the degree of access, yet this result is not consistent across all model specifications in Table 4.3. Appendix to Chapter IV presents additional robustness checks that further confirm the results reported in Table 4.2 and 4.3.

Table 4.3. Hurdle Negative Binomial: Access and level of access to Commission officials

	Access				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Membership involvement	-0.0381 (0.212)		-0.086 (0.216)		0.032 (0.349)
Organizational capacity		0.484** (0.242)	0.494** (0.243)		0.546** (0.273)
Transmission belt				0.064 (0.273)	-0.203 (0.475)
Group type: Non-business (REF)					
Group type: Business	0.626** (0.274)	0.590** (0.276)	0.594** (0.276)	0.620** (0.274)	0.594** (0.276)
Org. scale: (Sub) Nt'l assns (REF)					
Org. scale: European or Int'l associations	1.006** (0.402)	0.920** (0.404)	0.938** (0.407)	0.989** (0.401)	0.932** (0.407)
Scope of activity	0.115*** (0.043)	0.113*** (0.044)	0.114*** (0.044)	0.114*** (0.043)	0.114*** (0.044)
Membership diversity	-0.223* (0.115)	-0.226* (0.116)	-0.229** (0.116)	-0.219* (0.115)	-0.233** (0.116)
Organizational age	-0.004 (0.005)	-0.005 (0.006)	-0.005 (0.006)	-0.004 (0.006)	-0.005 (0.006)
Resources (FTE)	0.008** (0.004)	0.007** (0.004)	0.008** (0.004)	0.007** (0.004)	0.008** (0.004)
Constant	-1.640*** (0.608)	-2.411*** (0.675)	-2.322*** (0.711)	-1.698*** (0.554)	-2.503*** (0.832)
lnalpha	16.11 (20.32)	13.58 (131.8)	3.234 (5.146)	13.66 (65.95)	3.231 (4.882)
Log likelihood	-461.502	-457.876	-457.823	-461.148	-457.729
N	272	272	272	272	272

Table 4.3. Hurdle Negative Binomial: Access and level of access to Commission officials (*continued*)

	Level of access				
	Model 1b	Model 2b	Model 3b	Model 4b	Model 5b
Membership involvement	0.163 (0.436)		-0.103 (0.503)		-0.074 (0.657)
Organizational capacity		1.058** (0.524)	1.163** (0.525)		1.193* (0.680)
Transmission belt				0.443 (0.490)	-0.055 (0.825)
Group type: Non-business (REF)					
Group type: Business	0.089 (0.475)	-0.249 (0.489)	-0.248 (0.489)	-0.009 (0.484)	-0.253 (0.493)
Org. scale: (Sub) Nt'l assns (REF)					
Org. scale: European or Int'l associations	1.611** (0.787)	1.356* (0.781)	1.146 (0.913)	1.591** (0.783)	1.145 (0.884)
Scope of activity	0.069 (0.097)	0.107 (0.093)	0.119 (0.093)	0.089 (0.101)	0.117 (0.096)
Membership diversity	-0.036 (0.265)	-0.300 (0.338)	-0.441 (0.492)	-0.024 (0.262)	-0.447 (0.477)
Organizational age	-0.012 (0.013)	-0.011 (0.013)	-0.008 (0.014)	-0.013 (0.013)	-0.008 (0.014)
Resources (FTE)	0.093** (0.039)	0.039 (0.037)	0.021 (0.048)	0.085** (0.039)	0.021 (0.045)
Constant	-16.080 (20.310)	-13.900 (131.800)	-3.078 (6.373)	-13.480 (65.950)	-3.125 (6.067)
Inalpha	16.11 (20.32)	13.58 (131.8)	3.234 (5.146)	13.66 (65.95)	3.231 (4.882)
Log likelihood	-461.502	-457.876	-457.823	-461.148	-457.729
N	107	107	107	107	107

* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

4.6 Discussion and conclusions

This paper develops a novel theoretical approach to study how interest groups' member involvement and organizational capacity affect their degree of access to EU public officials. In this way, the findings inform us about the potential democratic contribution of groups with access to Commission officials – who are expected to reach out to groups that can increase the legitimacy and efficiency of the policy process.

Before discussing the main findings, this last section will reflect on three aspects related to the research design. First, this paper has analyzed how interest groups' organizational structure affects access by using reported survey data that tap key organizational elements. Thus, the paper looks at the formal opportunities for the participation of members, and

not at the actual involvement of members. In addition to examining actual involvement of members, future research could examine whether the organizational structures related to member involvement lead to an accurate alignment of the preferences of members and the positions of group leaders (Kröger, 2016, 2018).

Second, the groups included in the sample are active at the EU level and gained access to Commission officials. The need for professionalized and technical expertise might be accentuated in the Commission, which as the bureaucratic institution in charge of developing policy proposals is mostly concerned about the technicalities that would make a proposal viable. We may find different results if we study more politicized venues, such as the legislative arena where there is a higher demand for political knowledge (Grömping & Halpin, 2019). In addition, the effects of these organizational dimensions and the ability to function as a transmission belt might work differently at the national level (cf., Berkhout et al., 2017). In that regard, members might have few selective incentives to get involved in the groups due to its EU focus which could ultimately affect the organizational attributes to involve members and have organizational capacity. Future research needs to assess the occurrence and validity of the main explanatory factors and their effects on the degree of access in (sub)national polities.

Lastly, the paper focuses on the transmission belt function of membership-based interest groups. That is, it excludes non-membership organizations which according to the Transparency Register, represent almost half of the interest groups with access to Commission officials. The main argument to exclude these organizations is that they do not have the (implicit) responsibility to take into account the concerns of members and to be representative of their constituency. However, non-membership interest groups can develop important functions that complement and support the representative role of membership-based interest groups (E. T. Walker, McCarthy, & Baumgartner, 2011). Future research should delve into the relationship between membership and non-membership-based groups to more accurately assess the transmission belt function.

Despite these limitations, the analyses demonstrate that the most important organizational dimension to gain more access to the Commission is organizational capacity. This finding goes somewhat against the rhetoric of the Commission and its presumed willingness to interact with representative groups to compensate for its democratic deficit and expand the societal legitimacy of EU public policies (Kohler-Koch, 2010). Contrary to what is expected, based on this rhetoric, groups that invest time and resources on democratic and representative structures do not gain more access to the Commission, which contrasts with previous research focused on European associations (Albareda & Braun, 2019). Hence, the Commission has not yet put into practice the 'privileged partnership' arrangement with interest groups on the basis of representativeness criteria (European Commission, 2001; Pérez-Solórzano Borragán, 2014, p. 135). In contrast, the results indicate that the Commission mostly values efficient and professionalized groups

that are able to efficiently respond to public officials' demands, and provide them with valuable policy expertise (see also, Klüver, 2012). In line with Majone's (1999a) proposal, the EU's main concern appears to be output-legitimacy, which it seeks to obtain through technocratic principles and prioritizing interactions with professionalized groups.

From an interest groups perspective, these results suggest that the inefficiency costs related to member involvement come at a price of lower reactivity at the EU level (Hollman, 2018) and negatively affects access to administrative venues (Willems, 2020). In other words, for groups that enjoy high levels of access, maintaining member involvement might be very challenging, as it is rather costly and time-consuming, and might reduce their decision-making speed. What is more, groups that have complex organizational structures that combine member involvement and organizational capacity, and thus can offer a wider range of policy goods and provide them in an efficient manner, do not see any benefit in terms of more access to public officials. Thus, what matters for groups aiming to gain more meetings with Commission officials is to invest in professionalized structures that generate expertise and facilitate efficient policy responses to public officials' demands.

According to these findings, the interaction between interest groups and EU public officials is biased in favor of groups that may not be organizationally equipped to talk on behalf of their constituency, thus, decreasing the input legitimacy of the EU governance system (Kröger, 2014). This might be problematic from a democratic perspective as 'interest groups may be more willing to listen to the arguments of policymakers than represent the interests of their members' (Berkhout et al., 2017, p. 1110; see also, Kröger, 2016, p. 17). At a general level, these findings also raise the important question of whether Commission officials, and the EU more broadly, are active enough in reaching out to groups that make big efforts to involve and represent their constituency.

Notes

- 26 See: <http://www.cigsurvey.eu/data>
- 27 See: https://acim.uantwerpen.be/files/documentmanager/project/survey_samplingmemo_intereuro.pdf
- 28 The data is offered in an aggregate manner by Transparency International – Integrity Watch. See: <http://www.integrity-watch.eu/about.html>.
- 29 The t-test analyses indicate that neither the dependent variable nor the main explanatory and control factors are biased due to missing data.
- 30 The predicted number of meetings presented in the analyses are based on Model 5 of Table 4.2.
- 31 In total, 287 organizations have been excluded from the analysis due to missing values. The t-test analyses indicate that neither the dependent variable nor the main explanatory and control factors are biased due to missing data.

Chapter V

On Top of Mind, but Do They Mind?
Explaining Perceived Influence of
Prominent Groups among Public Officials

This chapter is co-authored with Caelesta Braun and Bert Fraussen.

ABSTRACT

This paper asks why and when public officials perceive some prominent interest groups as more influential for policy outcomes than others. Theoretically, we rely on resource-exchange and behavioral approaches. Perceived influence of prominent groups does not only follow from the policy capacities they bring to the table, it also relates to whether public officials consider groups as policy insiders. Both effects are assumed to be conditional on advocacy salience, i.e., the number of stakeholders mobilized in policy issues under discussion. We rely on a new dataset of 109 prominent groups involved in 29 regulatory issues passed between 2015-2016 at the European Union level. Our findings show that prominent groups with more analytical and political capacities are perceived as more influential for final policy outcomes. Yet, in policy issues with high advocacy salience, prominent groups that are considered as ‘policy insiders’ are perceived as more influential.

5.1 Introduction

Public officials regularly interact and consult interest groups to come up with effective, legitimate, and implementable public policies. Among the large community of interest groups that are politically active, public officials often regard a subset of groups as a key resource for formulating and developing public policies. These ‘prominent groups’ have distinct status among public officials as they are ‘assumed to be relevant to the issue at hand’ (Halpin & Fraussen, 2017a, p. 276). That is, they are on the top of public officials’ mind when working on specific policy issues and thus are expected to have a significant impact on policymaking processes (Grossmann, 2012; Maloney et al., 1994). However, the influence of prominent groups remains an empirical question that needs to be answered to further understand which groups have a louder voice in our democratic systems.

The literature on interest groups’ political activity has predominantly focused on the degree of access or the level of success of groups by considering group type (i.e., business and citizen groups) as well as relevant organizational attributes and capabilities (e.g., organizational form, decision-making structures, economic resources and types of information) (Bouwen, 2004; Dür et al., 2015; Dür & Mateo, 2013; Eising, 2007b; Flöthe, 2019a; Grömping & Halpin, 2019). However, we have scarce research that specifically focuses on prominent groups and that examines why some of them are more influential for final policy outcomes than others. Moreover, while most of the previous research has taken the perspective of the interest groups to assess access and influence, an examination of the policy impact of prominent groups needs to consider the preferences of public officials in charge of the legislative dossiers as they are the ones who select and interact with these prominent groups, and subsequently process their input into public policy. Therefore, to better understand which prominent groups are more influential in policymaking processes, this paper takes a public official perspective and focuses on those groups that are considered as relevant on specific policy issues. More specifically, we address the following research question: *why and when do public officials perceive some prominent groups as more influential than others?*

This paper aims to answer this question by advancing two main explanations. First, we build on resource exchange approaches theorizing that the policy capacities of groups, i.e., ‘the set of skills and resources—or competences and capabilities—necessary to perform policy functions’ (Wu et al., 2015), are crucial for their influential role on public-policy making (Bouwen, 2002; Daugbjerg et al., 2018; Eising, 2007b). Second, we complement this dominant approach by theorizing how behavioral dynamics and more specifically, being perceived as a policy insider among public officials – which is linked to the heuristics, shortcuts and routines that decision-makers rely on when working on policy issues (Jones, 2003; Simon, 1997) – explains the policy impact of prominent groups. Although both approaches are relevant to examine the perceived influence of interest groups in public policymaking, there is no research that simultaneously analyzes the effects of public

officials' policy needs and behavioral dynamics to clarify the varying policy impact of interest groups.

In addition to combining exchange and behavioral approaches, we also account for variation in the advocacy salience of the policy issue (i.e., the number of stakeholders that mobilize in the policy issue under discussion). The importance of issue-specific factors when studying the interaction between public officials and interest groups has been acknowledged in the literature (Bernhagen et al., 2015; Beyers et al., 2018; Junk, 2019b; Klüver et al., 2015). Accordingly, we focus on advocacy salience, which is a crucial moderating variable that alters the strategic choices and behavioral dynamics of public officials, and therefore could also shape variation in policy influence among prominent groups.

Empirically, the paper relies on quantitative information provided by top officials of the European Commission leading 29 EU regulatory issues passed between 2015-2016. More specifically, at least one of the leading officials in charge of developing the proposal of each of the 29 regulations or directives was interviewed. During the interview, they were asked about the 'key' interest groups with whom they interacted when developing the regulatory issues. Our analyses use quantitative data on 109 prominent interest groups mobilized in the 29 EU regulatory issues. Our findings show that the groups that are perceived as more influential for the final policy outcome are those that possess analytical and political capacities. When accounting for the moderating role of advocacy salience, we find that in issues with high advocacy salience prominent groups that are 'policy insiders' are perceived as more influential for policy outcomes. This novel finding has clear implications for our democratic and participatory systems. While an expansion of conflict, or the mobilization of many stakeholders, is often associated with a less influential role of policy insiders, we observe an opposite dynamic. It is particularly when faced with a higher number of stakeholders that public officials perceive policy insiders as more influential.

5.2 Explaining variation in influence among prominent groups

Prominent groups are defined as those that have 'pre-eminence for a particular constituency or viewpoint, and [are] therefore 'taken-for-granted' by a prescribed audience' (Halpin & Fraussen, 2017a, p. 725). In this paper, the audience are public officials in charge of formulating policy proposals, and thus prominent groups are those that are on top of these officials' mind when working on specific policy issues. Being perceived as a prominent group among public officials in charge of formulating policy proposals is a valuable asset for interest groups who seek policy impact by making their voices heard and taken into account in policymaking processes. Previous research has shown that not all groups achieve such a status among elected and public officials (Grossmann, 2012; see also, Ibenskas & Bunea, 2020). Furthermore, not all prominent groups are perceived as equally influential. Understanding why some prominent groups are more influential than

others adds to our knowledge about the inclusiveness of stakeholder engagement and the nature of the interaction between prominent groups and public officials.

We build upon the extensive literature on interest groups' political activity and put forward a theoretical framework that complements a resource exchange approach with behavioral dynamics of public officials to assess why some prominent groups are perceived as more influential for policy outcomes than others.

5.2.1 Policy capacities and influence

Following an exchange approach (Bouwen, 2002; Eising, 2007b; Flöthe, 2019a), we argue that public officials lack necessary resources to thoroughly develop policy proposals, and prominent groups possess (unequal levels of) policy capacities that can overcome this limitation. The ability of groups to possess and supply relevant policy input demanded by public officials is expected to shape their influential role in policymaking processes (Daugbjerg et al., 2018).

Aligned with previous work in the interest groups field, we distinguish between policy capacities related to the ability of groups to supply resources that ensure (1) technically thorough and (2) legitimate public policies (Daugbjerg et al., 2018). Public officials value groups for their ability to provide technical knowledge related to the content of policy issues, and for their capacity to provide the position of key constituencies and the political consequences of policy alternatives. In other words, we distinguish between analytical and political capacities (Bouwen, 2002, 2004; De Bruycker, 2016; Flöthe, 2019a; Hall & Deardorff, 2006; Truman, 1951).

Analytical capacities relate to the abilities to gather and offer policy expertise and technical knowledge required to understand the sector and the specific content of policy issues under debate (Daugbjerg et al., 2018). In order to develop consistent and implementable legislations, public officials are in need of quality policy input such as technical expertise as well as information about the legal aspects and the economic or societal impact of different policy measures (De Bruycker, 2016). Public officials need detailed, technical and evidence-based information in order to design policies that will be effective and feasible (Wright, 1996, p. 82). Some interest groups possess analytical capacities because of 'their daily work, their members' hands-on-experience or because they or their constituents are directly affected by the policy issue (Michalowitz, 2004; Wright, 1996)' (Flöthe, 2019a, p. 168). Yet, there is substantial variation in the extent to which interest groups possess analytical capacities (e.g., De Bruycker 2016). Public officials, therefore, will perceive those groups that possess and supply analytical capacities as more influential because their policy input is expected to facilitate the development of legislations.

H1: Prominent groups with more analytical capacities are perceived as more influential by public officials than those with less analytical capacities.

Public officials also require political capacities to make sure that legislations have the necessary political support and are accepted by constituencies that are affected and targeted by the policy (Maloney et al., 1994). Some interest groups have the organizational ability to provide information with respect to the ‘needs and interests’ of its membership (or of the sector or constituency advocated for)’ (Daugbjerg et al., 2018, p. 250). This is highly valuable for public officials as it signals who wants what, and the political consequences of policy alternatives. Ensuring that a legislation is aligned with the political interests of those that will be affected by it, is expected to foster the (input) legitimacy of the policy process (Klüver, 2011a). In addition, political capacities are expected to facilitate the future acceptance and implementation of policies, as those affected by a policy will have been involved in the decision-making process (Maloney et al., 1994). The ability to possess political information, mobilize public support and to mediate between key constituencies and policymakers (Berkhout et al., 2017; Bouwen, 2002; De Bruycker, 2016) varies across groups. Hence, not all groups have similar political capacities. Public officials will be particularly attentive to groups that possess and supply political capacities because their policy input is expected to reinforce the legitimacy of the policy process and facilitate the acceptance of the final legislation.

H2: Prominent groups with more political capacities are perceived as more influential by public officials than those with less political capacities.

5.2.2 Policy insiders and influence

Public officials also rely on routine patterns of interactions with interest groups. While these interactions might be shaped by the quality of policy capacities provided by the groups, other dynamics might also be at play (Braun, 2012, 2013). Take for instance the National Farmers’ Union of Scotland, which ‘has been stripped of internal independent research capacity, and has a low number of expert staff. It also has a small and shrinking resource base. Yet it is the dominant farm group in Scotland’ (Halpin, 2014, p. 180). As clearly described in Halpin’s quote, even when groups do not possess relevant analytical and political capacities, they might be key actors shaping the content of legislative initiatives.

A common explanation of the influence of interest groups is the extent to which they are policy insiders (Jordan & Maloney, 1997a). In this paper, we refer to “policy insiders” as those groups who have frequent interactions with public officials. Policy insiders, thus, achieve such a status because they are familiar or regular partners or are one of the few alternatives for public officials, which relates to the heuristics, shortcuts and routines that public officials rely on when working on policy issues. As boundedly rational actors, public officials are ‘prisoners’ to their limited attention spans, and the key governor of the allocation of attention: emotion’ (Jones & Baumgartner, 2012). That is, even when confronted with new policy issues, public officials rely on a specific repertoire of ‘encoded solutions’ to which

they are emotionally attached (Jones, 2003, p. 400). As shown in classic organizational studies (Cyert & March, 1963; March & Simon, 1958), public officials routinize important decisions, and this also applies to processes of listening and taking on board policy input from specific actors that are part of their policy community – which is also in line with the idea of policy inheritances (Rose & Phillip, 1994) and the fact the previous policy choices have long-lasting consequences, including continued engagement with stakeholders that were involved in these earlier policy process (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005, p. 49).

Public officials and ‘their’ policy insiders will tend to develop a sense of commonality about the main problems and solutions in the policy area (Campbell, 1989, p. 5). In other words, public officials and legislators often ‘listen to those whom they can trust implicitly because their interests agree perfectly’ (Hall & Deardorff, 2006, p. 76). Therefore, policy insiders are expected to have an important say on the final outcome of policy issues since, as noted by Jordan and Maloney (1997, 565), ‘civil servants try to satisfy “their” groups’. Due to their finite attention, public officials rely on those interest groups they already know and trust because of their frequent interaction, their familiarity or because they are considered as one of the few alternatives. That is, the extent to which some prominent groups are influential for final policy outcomes may be partially determined by socialization or routine behavior of public officials (Scott, 2001; Simon, 1997).

H3: Prominent groups that are more considered as policy insiders are perceived as more influential by public officials than those that are less considered as policy insiders.

5.2.3 When are some prominent groups perceived as more influential than others?

Under which conditions do policy capacities and being considered a policy insider become important factors affecting the perceived influence of prominent groups? We know from previous research that the perceived influence of policy capacities and policy insiders is expected to vary depending on the context in which a policy issue is being developed (for a discussion, see Klüver et al., 2015). We argue that advocacy salience, defined as the number of stakeholders mobilized in a particular policy issue, is a crucial conditioning factor to assess perceived influence of prominent groups (Beyers et al., 2018; Junk, 2019b). In issues with high advocacy salience, public officials are ‘bombarded with diverse information from many different sources, with varying reliabilities. Policymakers, as boundedly rational decision makers with human cognitive constraints, focus on some of this information and ignore most of it’ (Jones & Baumgartner, 2012). As a consequence, as policy issues receive more attention, public officials need to be even more selective, which is likely to alter their assessment of the value and impact of prominent groups.

Firstly, when policy issues attract a large number of actors, public officials are not expected to require more analytical capacities, as they can obtain technical and expert resources through the multiple stakeholders. Instead, analytical capacities are expected to

be more important for issues with low advocacy salience (De Bruycker, 2016; Mahoney, 2008). More specifically, public officials working on policy issues where a limited number of stakeholders are mobilized are expected to rely more heavily on the analytical capacities of prominent groups. Thus, prominent groups with more analytical capacities are perceived as more influential for the final policy outcome when advocacy salience is low.

Secondly, public officials are more concerned about obtaining political capacities when an issue mobilizes many stakeholders. As shown by Willems (2020), groups that provide broad societal support (i.e., political capacities) are more likely to gain access to advisory council in highly politicized policy domains. Highly salient issues require input legitimacy that can be obtained through political capacities (De Bruycker 2016), as this can facilitate the acceptance of the final outcome among the constituency that will be directly affected as well as by the general public (Maloney et al., 1994). As noted by Junk (2019b, p. 661), when an issue is salient in the lobbying community, ‘policy makers will be more wary of political repercussions of policy outcomes that lack broad support’. Consequently, prominent groups with more political capacities will be perceived as more influential for the final policy outcome when advocacy salience is high.

Thirdly, regarding the interaction between advocacy salience and policy insiders, we expect that in highly salient issues public officials are overloaded by information, and the scarce resource is not information yet attention (Simon, 1997). Because of the uncertainty surrounding salient issues, public officials are expected to rely more heavily on their routinized interaction with policy insiders, whom they can trust due to previous relations. Groups that are part of public officials’ policy communities (Jordan & Maloney, 1997a), provide strong and stable guides to behavior, particularly in complex circumstances, such as the ones that characterize highly salient policy issues (Jones & Baumgartner, 2012). Therefore, the perceived influence of policy insiders is expected to be higher in highly salient issues, as public officials will prioritize interactions with stakeholders they already know and trust.

H4a: The effect of analytical capacities on the perceived influence of prominent groups decreases when advocacy salience is high.

H4b: The effect of political capacities on the perceived influence of prominent groups increases when advocacy salience is high.

H4c: The effect of policy insiders on the perceived influence of prominent groups increases when advocacy salience is high.

5.3 Method

5.3.1 *The case: Public officials of the European Commission*

To study why and when public officials perceive some prominent groups as more influential than others, we focus on the perspective of public officials of the European Commission leading a set of regulatory issues. We center on Commission officials formulating and developing regulatory proposals as it is the dominant legislative output at the EU level (Majone, 1999b) and thus renders it a relevant case for an assessment of how policy capacities of prominent groups together with the behavioral dynamics of public officials shape the influential role of prominent groups.

Importantly, the European Commission is the institutional venue where policymaking processes are initiated within the EU. During the formative stage – before the Commission issues a legislative proposal that will be subsequently discussed at the European Parliament and the Council – public officials within the Commission consult and interact with interest groups so as to obtain political and expert information about the content of the legislation. The Commission's need for interest group policy capacities may be particularly high 'as it is understaffed and more dependent on outside input and information than other institutions' (Bouwen, 2009; McLaughlin, Jordan, & Maloney, 1993). The limited human and economic resources of the Commission as well as its intrinsic need for political information that legitimizes its activities (Rittberger, 2005) makes public officials working in this institution dependent on both analytical and political capacities from interest groups (Klüver, 2011a). Moreover, as in many other national and supranational polities, public officials of the Commission are also constrained by time and resources, which might lead to decision-making short-cuts, bias in selecting information, simplification and distortion in comprehending information, and cognitive and emotional identification with particular ways of solving problems (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005, p. 16).

5.3.2 *Sampling*

Our sample of regulatory issues is based on a three-step process. First, we selected all legislative output passed between 2015 and 2016 and that followed the ordinary legislative procedure – the standard decision-making process used for adopting EU legislation, covering the vast majority of areas of the EU (European Union, 2012). In total, we downloaded 127 legislations through Euro-Lex. Subsequently, we excluded cases that were exclusively distributional in nature (N=10), centered on EU agency functioning or EU internal matters (N=8), could not be classified in any of the six policy domains of interest for the project (n=36),³² and codifications of previous regulations (n=9). Secondly, Commission officials, either senior policy officers or heads or deputy heads of units leading the remaining 64 regulatory issues, were formally invited to participate in the research project. In total, we conducted 48 interviews with public officials of the European Commission

involved in 40 of our sampled issues. Lastly, this paper relies on the information provided by 31 public officials leading 29³³ regulatory issues for which interviewees mentioned at least one interest group as a key actor when developing the regulatory issue and provided information about the interest groups mentioned.³⁴

In total, public officials leading the 29 regulatory issues mentioned 109 interest groups as key actors when developing the policy under discussion – some of these groups are mentioned by several public officials involved in different policy issues, in that respect, the unique number of groups is 80.³⁵ By sampling interest groups through this process, our observations come close to the idea of prominent groups, as they were on-top of public officials' mind when asked about the stakeholders that were important when working on a particular policy issue (Halpin & Fraussen, 2017a).

The next subsection present how we operationalize the different variables. Our operationalizations and analyses rely on three different data sources. Firstly, our dependent and explanatory variables are constructed through the responses provided by public officials during the interviews. Secondly, for each of the groups mentioned by public officials we hand coded group-level characteristics by retrieving information from their websites. Lastly, we conducted desk research using EU official documents and websites in order to collect issue-level information about the 29 policy issues included in the study. In addition, we make use of a fourth database to test the validity of our dependent variable, namely interviews with representatives of prominent groups involved in the 29 policy issues.

5.3.3 Dependent variable

Our dependent variable (i.e., perceived influence) is measured with a question asked to public officials where they had to indicate to what extent the interest groups they mentioned as being key for the development of a policy issue were decisive for the policy outcomes. That is, instead of assessing whether a particular demand of an interest group was incorporated in the final legislation, we want to know if the voice of certain groups is perceived as more significant than others in the process of developing policy issues and in shaping the policy outcomes (Halpin, 2014, p. 182; Maloney et al., 1994, p. 26). Our measure is based on the perceptions of public officials involved in the process, which 'allows to gauge the impact of such an unobtrusive mechanisms and capture both formal and informal ways of influence' (Binderkrantz & Rasmussen, 2015; Flöthe, 2019a, p. 172; Tallberg et al., 2018). By focusing on public officials' perceived influence of prominent groups, we also account for the effects of subtle mechanisms such as the provision of policy capacities and behavioral patterns of public officials. More specifically, perceived influence is measured with the following question: "to what extent where the stakeholders decisive for the final policy outcome?" The options were: 1=Not at all; 2=To some extent; 3=To a large extent. On average, interest groups mentioned by public officials score 2.243 (SD=0.585).

Even though the public officials interviewed were mostly active at the formative stage, their knowledge about the policy issue and about the positions and preferences of the actors involved ensures that their assessment of the dependent variable is accurate. Nonetheless, to assess the validity of this variable and address common source bias, we compare the responses of public officials with the one given by interest group representatives involved in the same set of regulations and directives.³⁶ In thirty-one out of forty-three observations with available data from both public officials and interest groups, both public officials and interest group representatives assigned identical scores on the question about how decisive were the prominent groups for the final policy outcome, confirming the validity of our dependent variable.³⁷

5.3.4 Explanatory and moderating factors

Our explanatory variables are constructed based on public officials' assessment of their interaction with those groups that they mentioned as being key for the development of a regulatory issue. More specifically, we rely on the question "why did you interact with this actor". Respondents had to indicate whether each of the 9 items in Table 5.1 were applicable (1) or not (0) for the regulatory issue under scrutiny.

Table 5.1. Construct of explanatory variables

Variables	Reasons why public official interacted with interest groups
Analytical capacities	<i>For offering necessary policy expertise</i>
	<i>For offering high quality policy input in the past</i>
	<i>For offering an assessment of the societal impact</i>
Political capacities	<i>For offering political information</i>
	<i>For their ability to mobilize public support</i>
	<i>For representing a key constituency</i>
Policy insider	<i>For being a familiar partner</i>
	<i>For being one of the few alternatives</i>
	<i>For being a regular partner</i>

The items included in each of the three variables have been selected based on our conceptualization of the explanatory factors and confirmed with a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) (see Table A1 in Appendix to Chapter V). As reported in Table A1, having 'policy expertise' relates to 'analytical capacities' as well as with being a 'policy insider'. Additionally, the item 'for representing a key constituency' also relates to items in the 'analytical capacities' factor. Lastly, the item 'being a regular partner' included in the construct on 'policy insider' also relates to 'political capacities'.³⁸ Because some of the items relate to different dimensions, several robustness checks have been conducted to further validate the analyses.

The final variables are additive indexes that range from 0 to 3 for each of the three constructs. Prominent groups score on average 1.514 (SD=1.042) for analytical capacities, 1.202 (SD=1.034) for political capacities, and 2.009 (SD=0.986) for policy insider. Even though the three variables are significantly and positively correlated, the correlation coefficients between them are below 0.5 (see Table A2 in the Appendix to Chapter V).

In addition to these three core explanatory variables, we include a moderating factor: advocacy salience. We center on ‘advocacy salience’ as one of the dimensions related to salience that is distinct from ‘media’ and ‘decision-makers’ salience (Beyers et al., 2018). More precisely, this variable is measured by the number of stakeholders active on the issue through different consultation tools. This operationalization of salience based on the policy activity of lobbying actors has been used before (Bunea, 2013; Junk, 2019b; Klüver, 2011b). The fact that stakeholders mobilize in one of the consultation tools available at the EU level is a good indication that the policy matter is relevant and important for them. To obtain a complete list of groups involved in each of the legislation considered, we consulted the proposal of the European Commission, available consultation documents, and the impact assessments. As we aimed to obtain as comprehensive a picture of stakeholder mobilization as possible, we also revised other official documents, EU websites and register of expert groups. Furthermore, if the list of stakeholders participating in a particular type of consultation could not be identified via these publicly available sources, we contacted the responsible DG to request the list of stakeholders involved.³⁹ The final measure of advocacy salience is logged in the analysis due to a skewed distribution and transformed into a binary factor that distinguishes between issues with low advocacy salience from those with high advocacy salience.⁴⁰

5.3.5 Control variables

At the group-level, we control for group type by distinguishing between organizations that represent economic interest from citizen groups. There is significant debate in the field about whether group type matters for how influential they are (Dür et al., 2015; Klüver, 2013; Mahoney, 2008), yet the findings are not conclusive. We also control for whether interest groups have members – either individuals or organizations/institutions – or not. This is an important distinction as membership-based interest groups are more likely to possess political capacities, whereas non-membership groups, such as firms usually possess expert knowledge (Bouwen, 2002).

Lastly, at the issue-level, we control for whether the regulation relates to an economic or a non-economic policy domain. Following the logic that context matters (Halpin, 2014, pp. 191–192) when studying interest groups policy capacities and their potential relevance for shaping policy outcomes, we distinguish policy issues developed under ‘core’ economic Directorate-Generals (DGs) of the Commission from those developed in non-economic DGs.⁴¹ In that regard, we expect that these control variable might moderate the effect of

analytical and political capacities on the dependent variable, as the former are presumably more relevant among economic policy domains, whereas the latter is more demanded in non-economic policy domains.

Table A2 in the Appendix to Chapter V provides a summary of the descriptive statistics and the correlations coefficients among all the variables.

5.4 Examining perceived influence of prominent groups

Before presenting the results of the multivariate analyses, we provided a detailed description of our main variables. Regarding our dependent variable, only 8% of our observations were considered as 'not decisive at all' by public officials', whereas 60% and 32% were considered as 'to some extent' and 'to a large extent' decisive respectively. This variation in the extent to which prominent groups are perceived as influential by public officials indicates that the dependent variable (i.e., perceived influence) is empirically different from the sampling question (i.e., being a prominent group). Regarding our main explanatory factors, their average scores show that public officials more frequently consider policy insiders as prominent groups. This is followed by the possession of analytical capacities and, lastly, political capacities are the least frequently mentioned factor among public officials.⁴² However, as shown in the correlation matrix (Table A2 in Appendix to Chapter V), both analytical and political capacities are positively and significantly related to our dependent variable, whereas being a policy insider is not significantly related to the perceived influence of groups on policy outcomes.

To test the four hypotheses, we conducted seven multilevel Ordinary Least Squares regression (OLS). The level of observation are prominent groups that are nested in policy issues. All models are multilevel models with random intercepts for policy issues to account for the heterogeneity of different policy issues. One issue was dropped from the analysis because public officials did not answer how decisive were the six interest groups involved. Because of that, the final n is 103 actors and 28 policy issues. The models have been built stepwise, whereas the tables presented below include the full models with all controls. The results presented below are confirmed with several robustness checks (alternative model specifications, an ordinal regression, controlling for organizational age, resources and issue-complexity, and alternative operationalizations of our explanatory factors, see robustness tests in Appendix to Chapter V). Importantly, the Vif scores in the main models range from 1.135 to 1.482, indicating that multicollinearity is not a problem. Last, all Models in Table 5.2 and 5.3 yield a significant improvement of the model fit when compared to their baseline models with only the control variables.

Models 1 to 4 test hypotheses 1 to 3. We observe that H1 and H2 are confirmed. Groups that have more analytical and political capacities become more decisive for the final policy outcomes. Related to resource-exchange approaches, we find that public officials need interest groups' policy capacities and those groups that more actively invest in analytical

and political capacities become more influential. Regarding H1, public officials in the Commission need technical, detailed, and quality information about policy issues they are working on. In line with previous research, the possession of analytical resources increases the policy impact of groups in decision-making processes (Dür et al., 2015; Flöthe, 2019a; Tallberg et al., 2018). When testing H2, we also find a positive and significant relationship between political capacities and the perceived influence of prominent groups. Intriguingly, previous investigations exploring the effects of similar construct, namely the possession of political information on lobbying success at the national (Flöthe 2019) and international (Tallberg et al. 2018) level, do not find the same relationship. Yet, political capacity (measured in terms of citizen support) has been identified as a relevant factor affecting influence of interest groups in studies focusing on the interaction between groups and the European Commission (Klüver 2011). Public officials of the Commission may be particularly attentive to groups with political information (more than public officials in other polities) due to the democratic deficit of EU institutions (Rittberger, 2005) and the need to legitimize policy choices to different audiences.

Table 5.2. Multilevel OLS regression

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
H1: Analytical capacities	0.303*** (0.047)			0.279*** (0.054)
H2: Political capacities		0.252*** (0.060)		0.130** (0.061)
H3: Policy insider			0.059 (0.083)	-0.118 (0.078)
<i>Controls</i>				
Group type (Ref: Citizen groups)	-0.002 (0.094)	0.155 (0.112)	-0.012 (0.115)	0.060 (0.102)
Membership group (Ref: Non-member groups)	-0.122 (0.118)	-0.029 (0.130)	0.073 (0.149)	-0.096 (0.122)
Advocacy salience (Ref: Low)	0.328 [†] (0.185)	0.266 (0.173)	0.240 (0.180)	0.317 [†] (0.176)
Policy domain (Ref: Non-economic)	-0.268 (0.201)	-0.226 (0.189)	-0.232 (0.205)	-0.317 (0.198)
Constant	1.801*** (0.190)	1.801*** (0.202)	2.062*** (0.242)	1.852*** (0.224)
N observations	103	103	103	103
N issues	28	28	28	28
Log Likelihood	-63.021	-71.196	-79.078	-59.821
Akaike Inf. Crit.	142.042	158.392	174.156	139.643
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	163.120	179.469	195.234	165.990

[†] p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Contrary to our expectations, the extent to which groups are perceived as policy insiders by public officials does not affect their perceived influence on policy outcomes, hence H3 is rejected. Even though our descriptive statistics show that being a policy insider is the most important reasons to gain a prominent status – which is aligned with previous research (see Braun 2013) –, it does not matter when explaining perceived influence. That is, even though some prominent groups may become part of the ‘policy community’ of public officials and may have close relationships with them (what Baumgartner & Jones, 1993 label as policy monopoly), that does not necessarily mean that they are more influential on specific policy outcomes.

Table 5.3 tests the moderating effect that advocacy salience has on the relationship between our explanatory factors and prominent groups’ perceived influence (H4s). None of our policy capacity factors is significantly related to the dependent variables when controlling for the moderating effect of advocacy salience. However, we observe different trends in Figure 5.1(a) and 5.1(b). Whereas having analytical capacities is always important to be perceived as influential for policy outcomes (regardless of the levels of advocacy salience), prominent groups with more political capacities are perceived as more influential when advocacy salience is high. The higher exposure of salient policy issues makes groups with political capacities more relevant, since public officials want to ensure that they accept the final policy outcomes. However, the effects depicted in Figure 5.1(b) are not significant when including the control variables (p-value = 0.145, see model 6).

Figure 5.1. Estimated coefficients of the explanatory variables (y-axes) in low (0) and high (1) advocacy salience (x-axes).

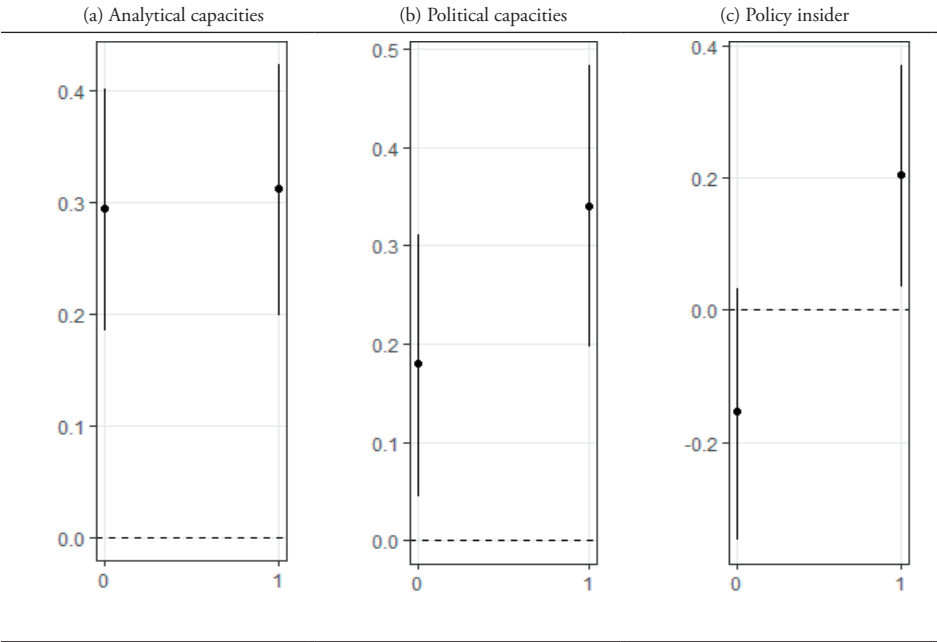


Table 5.3. Multilevel OLS regression – Interaction effects

	(5)	(6)	(7)
Analytical capacities	0.295*** (0.063)		
Political capacities		0.179** (0.077)	
Policy insider			-0.155 (0.110)
<i>Controls</i>			
Group type (Ref: Citizen groups)	0.298 (0.236)	0.043 (0.229)	-0.456 (0.314)
Membership group (Ref: Non-member groups)	-0.001 (0.094)	0.130 (0.113)	0.034 (0.114)
Advocacy salience (Ref: Low)	-0.122 (0.118)	-0.0004 (0.130)	0.131 (0.149)
Policy domain (Ref: Non-economic)	-0.266 (0.200)	-0.200 (0.189)	-0.219 (0.183)
<i>Interaction effects</i>			
H4a: Analytical capacities * Advocacy salience	0.018 (0.089)		
H4b: Political capacities * Advocacy salience		0.162 (0.110)	
H4c: Policy insider * Advocacy salience			0.359** (0.140)
Constant	1.816*** (0.202)	1.887*** (0.209)	2.409*** (0.258)
N observations	103	103	103
N issues	28	28	28
Log Likelihood	-63.000	-70.127	-76.232
Akaike Inf. Crit.	144.000	158.254	170.463
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	167.713	181.967	194.176

* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Regarding H4c, public officials perceive policy insiders as more influential for final policy outcomes when policy issues are highly salient. Importantly, this finding holds when considering the moderating effect of advocacy salience as a continuous (logged) variable (see Figure A1 in Appendix to Chapter V). This result indicates that public officials behave differently depending on issue saliency and they perceive policy insiders as more influential when the lobbying community is highly mobilized. In this situation, the problem for public officials is that there is too much attention and information. Consequently, they rely on previous experiences to assess which groups' policy input should be taken into account. Hence, when

there is a lot of noise around a particular policy issue, public officials rely on shortcuts and base their decisions on the input of groups that they know and trust due to previous relations, the policy insiders.

This finding is aligned with Jordan and Maloney's (1997) discussion of policy communities. As they note, 'policy community (...) are a means to make sense within the complexity of modern policy making' (Jordan & Maloney, 1997a see also, Jones and Baumgartner 2012). That is, particularly in highly salient policy issues with ambiguous and complex patterns, policy is resolved in terms of pragmatism and based on trust relationships derived from previous interactions. Yet, as a consequence, public officials might fall into the confirmation bias trap and pay more attention to those groups that were valuable or trustworthy partners in previous policy process. While this facilitates order and control over the policy process, it may hamper the ability to comprehensively tackle policy issues (Baumgartner & Jones, 2015, pp. 13–16).

As regards the group- and issue-level control variables, only advocacy salience is significantly related to our dependent variable (see Model 4 in Table 5.2). The remaining control variables are not significantly related to perceived influence for the final policy outcome: Economic groups are not perceived as being more or less influential for the final policy outcome when compared to citizen groups (for a discussion see, Dür et al., 2015). Likewise, representing members (either organizations or individuals) does not matter either for perceived success, and neither does the substantive nature of the policy issue (economic versus non-economic) shape the influence of interest groups.

5.5 Conclusions

This paper examines why and when do public officials perceive some prominent groups as more influential for policy outcomes of EU regulatory issues while accounting for the moderating role of advocacy salience. In doing so, we make three important contributions to the literature. First, we assess the political relevance of prominent groups by unpacking why and when some of them are they perceived as more influential for policy outcomes. Secondly, while providing a public official perspective, we combine resource-exchange and behavioral approaches, and in this way offer a more comprehensive understanding of prominent groups' perceived influence. Thirdly, we control for the moderating role of advocacy salience, a crucial contextual factor that alters the strategic and behavioral choices of public officials and thus may shape their interaction with prominent groups and the policy impact of such groups.

Our empirical focus and design have two implications for the interpretation and generalizability of our findings. Firstly, our contextualized analysis on prominent groups' perceived influence affects the number of observations we can include in our models as not many groups can be regarded as prominent by public officials. However, we put forward a relevant framework that can be further tested while considering interest groups in general.

Secondly, our analysis is centered on EU regulatory issues, which may affect how our results travel across other polities and legislative types. For instance, the EU demands expertise and legitimacy, two resources that may be less outspoken among national governments.

Our findings have important implications for the assessment of prominent groups in policymaking processes. According to our results, public officials particularly value policy capacities as both analytical and political capacities in hands of prominent groups increase their perceived influence on policy outcomes. This is in line with expectations about the strategic choices of public officials derived from exchange theory and resonates with earlier interest group research. Intriguingly, the relevance of policy capacities for the perceived influence of prominent groups is not contingent on the advocacy salience of regulatory issues. In other words, the possession of analytical and political capacities is always important for prominent groups if they want to have policy impact on decision-making processes.

A major novelty of our study is that prominent groups considered as policy insiders among public officials are perceived as more influential when advocacy salience is high. This might be problematic as it is not yet clear why some prominent groups become policy insiders. The influence of policy insiders in highly salient issues is a clear illustration of the role of public officials' emotions and shortcuts when dealing with complex and uncertain issues. These shortcuts ease the decision-making process, but that may hamper the democratic output of these regulatory issues because relevant alternative views, perspectives and voices might not be taken into account (see the trade-off between diversity and clarity described by Baumgartner & Jones, 2015, pp. 50–52). From a normative point of view, it is precisely in highly salient policy issues that public officials should combine information from different sources to gauge the magnitude of the problem and to design an appropriate response. However, public officials seem to fall into the 'identification with the means' phenomenon (Simon 1997), which locks in previous ways of doing things, making adoption of a new or alternative policy solution more difficult and less smooth than it otherwise would be.

NOTES

- 32 To account for variation across policy areas (Van Ballaert, 2017), the policy issues included cover different policy areas where the EU has exclusive or shared competence with member states: (1) Finance, banking, pensions, securities, insurances; (2) State aids, commercial policies; (3) Health; (4) Sustainability, energy, environment; (5) Transport, telecommunications; (6) Agriculture and fisheries.
- 33 In one issue, the input provided by the leading public official was subsequently complemented with two interviewees also involved in the same dossier that provided information on three additional stakeholders that were involved in the process but not mentioned by the first interviewee.
- 34 In the remaining 11 legislations, public officials did not mention interest groups.
- 35 On average, public officials involved in the 29 regulatory issues mentioned 3,76 prominent groups ($SD=2.41$; min.=1, max.=9).
- 36 All the interest groups mentioned by public officials were invited for an interview to discuss the policy issue in which they were mentioned. In total, 41 interviews were conducted with interest group representatives. In these interviews, interest group representatives were asked (1) which were according to them the “key” stakeholders involved in the policy issue and (2) “how decisive were key stakeholders involved in the policy issue under examination”.
- 37 We do not observe any major disagreement among the twelve cases with different scores. In eleven cases where public official indicated that the actor was decisive either to some extent or to a large extent, interest groups never said that the actors was not at all decisive. In one observation public official considered an actor as not at all decisive, whereas the interest groups interviewed regarded the actor as ‘to some extent’ decisive. Interest group representatives assign higher levels of decisiveness to other interest groups (mean= 2.54, $SD=0.50$; $N=43$) when compared to public officials (mean= 2.35; $SD=0.52$; $N=43$). As a further test of the validity of the variable, we ran ICC test among the scores assigned by public officials and other stakeholders. The value is 0.56, indicating a fair/good reliability score (Hallgren, 2012).
- 38 We understand that being a prominent group is conceptually and empirically different from being a policy insider. Whereas prominent groups are those organizations that are considered as key or relevant on a specific policy issue, policy insiders are the ones that have frequent interactions with public officials. In that regard, some groups that are considered as prominent might not be policy insiders for the public official. For instance, a niche environmental organization might be on top of public official mind when working on a regulation that taps into the topic that concerns the environmental group. But the public official might have never interacted before with such an organization because the regulation addresses a new policy issue, and thus it cannot be considered as a policy insider.
- 39 By relying on an adapted version of the consultation tools listed by the European Commission Better Regulation Guidelines, we reviewed the following consultation tools: open/public (online) consultation; survey and questionnaire; stakeholder conference/public hearings/events; stakeholder meetings/workshops/seminars; focus groups; interviews; commission expert groups/similar entities; SME panels; consultations of local/regional authorities (networks of the Committee of the Regions); direct consultation of special stakeholder groups (including Member States); others.
- 40 The skewness of the raw variable is 1.04, which is aligned with previous research (Baumgartner, Berry, Hojnacki, Kimball, & Leech, 2009). More specifically, on average policy issues attracted 98.38 stakeholders ($SD=108.114$), with some issues having zero stakeholders involved through the consultations mechanisms considered and one issue that attracted 341 stakeholders. The dichotomization of the logged variable is based on the quantile distribution of the logged variable (from 0 to 50% is categorized as “low” and from 51 to 100% as “high”), and is aimed at avoiding that few extreme observations drive the results of our models. However, our robustness section runs the models with this variable as a continuous (logged) factor and the results hold.
- 41 Regulations and directives have been coded as 1 when the DGs responsible was Competition, Economic and Financial Affairs, Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, or Taxation and Customs Union. Otherwise, the policy issues have been coded as 0 (Murdoch & Trondal, 2013, p. 7).
- 42 Based on a one-sample t-test comparing the means of each factor to the overall mean of the three factors, we find that policy insiders have a significantly higher mean, while political capacities’ mean is significantly lower. Analytical capacities, does not significantly deviate from the overall mean.

Chapter VI

On the Value of Unpacking Interest
Groups: Lessons Learned and Future
Research Directions

A core question in political science and public administration is whose interests and preferences are represented through interest groups and which ones are more frequently heard and taken on board by policymakers. Interest groups have become key players in western democracies to tackle complex and wicked policy problems, they supplement and complement other forms of political representation such as political parties and function as relevant intermediary actors connecting societal interests to policymaking processes. Yet, this intermediary function of interest groups is not a straightforward endeavor as it requires paying attention and investing in organizational structures to involve their members while efficiently transferring policy input to public officials. While public officials often interact with interest groups to obtain policy information that is representative of the members and constituency of the group, interest groups face difficulties when and reconciling their capacity to involve their members while being active in policymaking processes. In that regard, an accurate examination of which interests and preferences are being represented and heard in policy systems requires unpacking interest groups. In doing so, it is possible to more accurately assess interest groups' internal ability to involve and represent their members and their ability to transfer policy input to public officials.

This dissertation contributes to advance our understanding of the democratic role that interest groups play in governance systems by theoretically conceptualizing and empirically examining interest groups as transmission belts that are expected to collect, aggregate and transfer the preferences of their members to policymakers. To better understand the intermediary role of groups, the study focuses on how groups are internally organized, a crucial element that affects the ability of groups to balance and reconcile two somewhat conflicting organizational dimensions related to the transmission belt function: member involvement and organizational capacity. Whereas the first one is aimed at collecting and aggregating input from members, the latter is centered on the organizational ability to efficient and effectively communicate with public officials. By unpacking interest groups, the dissertation provides a novel approach to assess the democratic role of groups in governance systems.

Empirically, the dissertation examines how groups mobilized at the EU level balance their investment in each organizational dimension related to the transmission belt function. Moreover, it studies when groups are more likely to function as transmission belts and the consequences of these organizational characteristics for their political relevance among public officials. By treating the transmission belt function of interest groups as both independent and dependent variable, the dissertation provides a comprehensive assessment of the intermediary role of interest groups and addresses the two overarching research questions formulated in the introduction:

1. *How and when do interest groups organize themselves as transmission belts?*
2. *How does the transmissive role and interest groups' policy capacities affect their political relevance?*

The first two empirical chapters explore the transmission belt ideal and the potential factors affecting interest groups' likelihood to become organized and operate as intermediary actors that connect their members with policymakers. The last two empirical chapters examine how the transmission belt role and the policy capacities of interest groups affect their political relevance (i.e., access and influence) among public officials. The following sections discuss the main results of the four empirical chapters of the dissertation, the limitations of the study, several avenues for future research, and the implications for practice and society.

6.1 Main findings and contributions

6.1.1 Block I: Seeking and finding transmission belts

This dissertation conceptualizes the transmission belt ideal as the organizational ability that interest groups possess to reconcile and balance the involvement of members and the organizational capacity to interact with public officials. An empirical exploration of the conceptualization put forward shows that one third of the groups mobilized at the EU level are organizationally equipped to function as transmission belts. Thus, most groups mobilized at the EU level only invest in one of the two organizational dimensions, or have poorly developed organizational structures. Consequently, only a minority of the groups mobilized at the EU level are organizationally prepared to contribute with input and output legitimacy, and demonstrate the organizational features necessary for facilitating the involvement of their members and efficiently interacting with policymakers (Chapter II).

Given the variation in the extent to which transmission belts are found, the dissertation examines when interest groups are more likely to function as intermediary actors. An exploration of the factors that affect interest groups' organizational structure shows that having a more diverse membership-base (i.e., including individuals, different types of organizations – profit/nonprofit –, and national/European associations) negatively affects the likelihood of being organized as a transmission belt. Relatedly, the data shows that internal diversity is positively related to exclusively investing in professionalized structures aimed at increasing organizational capacity (Chapter II). That is, when the membership-base is more heterogeneous, there is a higher likelihood that groups will invest less in member involvement and focus more on organizational capacity – a logical organizational decision considering the severe collective action problems that derive from having a diverse membership-base (Olson, 1965).

This finding and the reasons why interest groups are more likely to function as a transmission belt are further explored by focusing on the internal mechanisms that interest groups put in place to ensure that their members are involved and their voices are taken into account when establishing policy positions (Chapter III). Importantly, interview data

from interest group leaders indicates that the diversity of the membership-base – when conceptualized as the presence of unequal resources among the members – affects the extent to which members are effectively involved in the group. Poorly endowed members are less actively engaged in the processes of establishing policy positions that are subsequently communicated to public officials. Consequently, groups can fall into a representational strain where the interests of more resourceful members are better represented than the ones of poorly endowed members (Kröger, 2018; Schnyder, 2016; Strolovitch, 2006). Moreover, the ability of groups to function as a transmission belt is contingent on how the policy issue under discussion is perceived by the leadership and the members of the organization. Even when groups possess the organizational structures that fit the transmissive purpose, the leadership of the groups often by-passes those members that are not expected to have a direct stake on the policy issue under discussion. What is more, when members perceive that the policy issue under discussion does not affect their direct interest, they are less likely to get involved in the process of establishing policy positions. In contrast, when the different members have a high stake on the policy issue under discussion, they become highly involved and engaged, which reinforces the transmission belt function of groups. Hence, the transmission belt function cannot be taken for granted as it is found in different intensities depending on whether policy issues are perceived as particularistic or conflictual among the leaders and members (Smith, 2000).

Intriguingly, the results show that the most frequently used typology to examine interest groups (i.e., citizens vs. business groups), does not help us explain the internal organizational structure of groups and the extent to which they invest in the organizational dimensions related to the transmission belt ideal (see also, Rodekamp, 2014). More specifically, being a citizen or a business organization is not statistically related to being a transmission belt and it does not explain variation in the process of member involvement when establishing policy positions. While aligned with large-n studies examining interest groups member involvement (Binderkrantz, 2009) and professionalization (Klüver & Saurugger, 2013), this finding nuances the idea that business are often representative of their membership-base while citizen groups tend to be professionalized and less connected to their members (De Bruycker et al., 2019; Greenwood, 2007; Warleigh, 2003). In other words, the results of this study indicate that business and citizen groups mobilized at the EU level are similarly capable to organize themselves as transmission belts.

It is worth to underline and further discuss two important contributions resulting from the findings of the first block of the dissertation. First, internal diversity affects how interest groups are organized, hence the more homogeneous the membership-based, the higher the likelihood that the organization will function as a transmission belt. In contrast, groups with more heterogeneous membership-base face higher costs of collective action (Offe & Wiesenenthal, 1980; Olson, 1965), and this affects their ability to set up structures that involve the members. This implies that, to guarantee the representation of the members,

interest groups have to be rather specific and niche-oriented, which is aligned with the pluralist perspective of interest groups and the idea that likeminded individuals (or organizations) will come together in response to disturbances in the policy environment (Dahl, 1961; Truman, 1951). However, highly specific groups, even if they are transmission belts, may become less relevant for public officials who favor interactions with encompassing groups that reduce the transaction costs of meeting with multiple organizations. Previous research has shown that the representativeness of groups – understood as the ability of groups to aggregate the interest of multiple regions and/or countries – positively affects the likelihood of gaining access to EU public officials (Albareda & Braun, 2019). As a consequence, interest groups have to resolve the trade-off between being niche-oriented and easily representing their homogenous members, or expanding their scope to be politically relevant yet facing more difficulties to properly engage and represent their diverse membership-base.

The second contribution is that the functioning of the transmission belt is issue-contingent, that is, it depends on how the policy issue under debate (un)equally affects the members of the group as perceived by the leader of the organization. Even when interest groups have the organizational structures that fit the transmission belt ideal, the type of issue under discussion affects the extent to which members get involved, and consequently, how and to what extent different perspectives of the membership-base are collected and aggregated. Hence, providing context is not only relevant when examining interest groups' strategies and political relevance (Bernhagen et al., 2015; Klüver et al., 2015; Smith, 2000), it is also key to assess the intermediary function of groups, which ultimately affects their representative potential and their ability to contribute to governance systems with input and output legitimacy. Paradoxically, the findings show that groups experience high levels of member involvement (which enables their transmissive function) particularly when policy issues generate conflict among members. When members have different perspectives, challenging consensus-based decision-making processes, we observe higher degrees and intensities of member involvement. The leadership of the groups as well as the organizational mechanisms in place to resolve conflicting perspective within the group, thus, become paramount to advance representative positions and fulfil the transmission belt function.

All in all, the first block of the dissertation demonstrates that interest groups have varying organizational formats and implement different processes to involve their members in policy issues. This variation has important normative implications as it affects the representative potential of groups. Additionally, as discussed in the next sections, it also shapes the ability of groups to become politically relevant actors in EU policymaking processes.

6.1.2 Block II: Political relevance of transmission belts

How does the transmissive role and interest groups' policy capacities affect their political relevance? The findings of this dissertation on this question are rather mixed. While focusing on the number of meetings that interest groups have with EU public officials, the data shows that investing in organizational capacity and professionalized structures leads to a significantly higher level of access to EU public officials (Chapter IV). Contrary to what was expected and despite the rhetoric of the Commission to favor the interaction with representative interest groups, the findings show that investing in member involvement and being organized as a transmission belt does not pay-off in terms of degree access. In other words, the findings signal that public officials prioritize the interaction with professionalized organizations that are able to efficiently respond to public officials' demands and/or provide policy expertise. Yet, it is worth noting that the input legitimacy of these professional organizations might be questioned as they 'may be more willing to listen to the arguments of policymakers than represent the interests of their member' (Berkhout et al., 2017, p. 1110; see also, Leech, Baumgartner, Pira, & Semanko, 2005).

This rather pessimistic view of interest groups' democratic contribution to policymaking processes is nuanced when focusing on perceived influence of prominent groups (Chapter V). The findings indicate that the capacity to provide political support and legitimacy (i.e., political capacities) as well as the ability to gather and offer policy expertise and technical knowledge (i.e., analytical capacities) matter for interest groups' perceived influence among EU public officials.⁴³ Importantly, both types of policy capacities are important when policy issues are categorized as low or high in saliency. Yet, there is a trend that shows how groups with more political capacities are perceived as more influential in highly salient policy issues (for similar findings see, Willems, 2020). This indicates that the ability to provide political capacities (related to the ability to signal political preferences of the constituency and supply input legitimacy), might be dependent on the nature of the policy issue and, particularly in highly salient issues, interest groups supplying input legitimacy become more influential. Yet, as discussed in Chapter V, this finding should be taken with caution as the significance levels of the p-value in the regression models decrease when controlling for group type (i.e., business vs. citizen groups). Nonetheless, this observation also connects with the result of Chapter III, namely that interest groups dealing with internally conflictual issues that generate different preferences among members are more likely to have high degrees of member involvement. Considered together, these findings show how both internal conflict and external salience may contribute to the ability of groups to function as transmission belts and become more influential in policymaking processes. The other side of the coin is that in issues that do not receive much attention either by members or other stakeholders, the transmissive role becomes diluted and less relevant, and this can be normatively problematic considering that salient issues are the exception rather than the norm (Baumgartner & Leech, 2016; Halpin & Thomas, 2012a).

More generally, the findings of Chapters IV and V point toward the idea that different logics and mechanisms take place when gaining (more) access than when achieving a prominent status and influence. Whereas access seems to be mostly granted to professionalized groups, a prominent status is more often attributed by public officials to groups that are organized as transmission belts.⁴⁴ While this observation needs to be validated with additional research, this finding might be explained by the conceptual differences between access and prominence (Fraussen, Graham, & Halpin, 2018; Halpin & Fraussen, 2017a). It can be argued that, while interest groups have some agency regarding whether and how often they meet with public officials, gaining a prominent status is more outside their control and largely dependent on the perception of groups by public officials. Nonetheless, more research is needed to assess such an argument and to examine whether the organizational ability of groups to function as a transmission belt plays any role in public officials' decision to grant them a prominent status in certain policy issues.

Aligned with the results of the first block, the findings of Chapters IV and V suggest that being a business or a citizen group is not an important factor explaining access or influence to public officials, particularly when accounting for the organizational structure and the policy capacities of interest groups. These results add to the rather mixed findings of previous studies examining the effects of group type on access or success (e.g., Binderkrantz et al., 2014; Dür et al., 2015). In other words, the assumption that businesses always win has to be nuanced and, aligned with previous research, the findings of the dissertation point towards the importance of controlling for additional factors such as the nature of the policy issue (see also, Bernhagen et al., 2015). More importantly, beyond group typology, public officials seem to be attentive to the type of policy capacities interest groups can offer. In that regard, paying attention to the internal organization of groups is crucial as it determines the extent to which they can generate and offer analytical or political capacities, and ultimately obtain access or influence (see for instance, Albareda, 2020; Albareda & Braun, 2019; Grömping & Halpin, 2019; Klüver, 2012a). It is worth noting that the organizational ability to generate policy capacities is not related to whether they are businesses or citizen group; as noted in the discussion of the findings in the first block, both business and citizen groups are equally (un)capable of organizing themselves as transmission belts. Consequently, one should be careful to relate specific group types to the possession of different types of policy information and access goods. Instead, it seems necessary to unpack interest groups, and to more explicitly assess whether they have certain policy capacities or not, and how the varying presence of these capacities affect their political relevance among policymakers.

Last, by taking the public official perspective, the dissertation also unveils the importance of the behavioral routines and heuristics that public officials rely on in policymaking processes, either consciously or unconsciously (Jones, 2003; Simon, 1997). The empirical findings show that, particularly in highly salient policy issues (i.e., those that attract a

large number of stakeholders), public officials perceive policy insiders (i.e., interest groups with whom they frequently interact) as more influential for policy outcomes (Chapter V). From a normative point of view, this finding can be problematic because issues that attract a large number of actors could be dominated by policy insiders that are considered as familiar or regular partners, thus potentially neglecting other relevant yet less well-known or visible voices. In terms of theory, this finding also highlights the importance of broadening the theoretical scope that is usually considered when examining interest group access and influence on policymaking processes, i.e., resource exchange approach (e.g., Berkhout, 2013; Bouwen, 2002; Braun, 2012; Hall & Deardorff, 2006). Despite the value and relevance of the exchange approach, these findings suggest that behavioral approaches of decision-making should not be omitted from the equation as they can provide us with valuable explanations of why some groups gain more access and which ones are more influential in public policy processes (see also, Braun, 2012, 2013).

6.2 Limitations and future research

This section discusses the implications of specific research choices for the interpretation and generalizability of the results presented in the empirical chapters. First, this dissertation focuses on interest groups mobilized at the EU level. As noted by De Bruycker et al. (2019, p. 296), these type of groups might be different from interest groups focused at national polities for two main reasons: (1) mobilizing and being politically active at the EU level is a costly and cumbersome endeavor; and (2) ‘interest groups working at the EU level, compared to national or local groups, must aggregate a larger and more diverse set of interests (Kohler-Koch, 2013)’. In that regard, the interest groups considered in this dissertation might be characterized for facing more difficulties to involve their members in policy-related issues. In contrast, interest groups mobilized at the national or subnational level, because of their physical proximity and a more homogenous membership-based, do not face the same hurdles to involve their members. Consequently, it might be that the groups included in the analyses of Chapters II and IV – which consider the full population of interest groups mobilized at the EU level – are less likely to invest in member involvement and to function as transmission belts if we would compare to similar samples of interest groups mobilized at the national or local level. In other words, the incidence of transmission belts at the EU level might be lower than at national polities. Future research can assess how interest groups mobilized at different levels of government (local, national, and supranational) differ in the extent to which they function as transmission belts. By doing so, it will be easier to establish benchmarks and compare whether the percentage of transmission belts in other levels of government differs significantly from the findings obtained at the EU level.

Second, and related to the previous point, this dissertation puts forward a conceptualization of transmission belts that is relevant for interest groups that have individuals,

firms, institutions, and membership-groups or other associations as members (Albareda, 2021). However, mostly due to the focus on interest groups mobilized at the EU level, the samples used in this dissertation have a limited number of interest groups that have individuals as members, and thus that directly represent individuals. In that regard, most of the observations in the empirical chapters are interest groups that have organizations (i.e., firms, institutions, and other membership-groups or associations) as members. The internal mechanisms to involve members and develop organizational capacity might vary depending on the type of members that are being represented as the incentive structures and collective action problems vary if members are individuals or organizations (see Jordan et al., 2004). In contrast to individual members, organizational members are shorter in supply and thus group leaders want to avoid the exit strategy. Furthermore, organizational members often have a direct stake in the work of the group, and possess relevant information that can be transferred to the association or umbrella level (Albareda, 2021; Gulati, Puranam, & Tushman, 2012). As a consequence, the interest groups taken into account in the analyses might have higher levels of member involvement than other type of groups whose direct members are individuals instead of organizations. Future research needs to empirically assess whether the findings particularly related to Chapter III and the process of member involvement observed among umbrella organizations are transferable to individual-based interest groups, and even beyond that, to other types of political organizations such as political parties. Considered together the first and second limitation point to two potentially relevant, yet contrasting biases: whereas groups mobilized at the EU level face higher hurdles to involve their members, the members of the groups included in the analyses are mostly organizations, instead of individuals, which makes it more likely to observe higher levels of involvement. All in all, this calls for more research considering a wider and more diverse set of membership-based groups active at different levels of government and with all sorts of members.

The third limitation relates to the second block of the dissertation. Chapters IV and V, which focus on the political relevance of interest groups, have taken as a dependent variable access and perceived influence among EU Commission officials. In other words, the focus has been placed on the European Commission and more specifically on the meetings that Commission officials have had with interest group representatives. Therefore, the dissertation cannot account for the role that interest groups play in other consultation mechanisms available within the European Commission, such as public consultations, expert groups, workshops and seminars, etc. (Fraussen, Albareda, et al., 2020). More importantly, other relevant policy venues, particularly the Parliament, the Council, and the media, have not been considered in the study. As discussed by Eising (2007a), institutional context matters when examining why some interest groups have more access and become more decisive for policy outcomes. The policy capacities demanded by public officials in other venues and the logics they implement to legitimize their work might vary and, sub-

sequently, the type of groups they interact with can also change. In that regard, Grömping and Halpin (2019), focusing on interest group's access to the Australian parliament, find that structures related to the involvement of members in the process of establishing policy positions leads to higher levels of access, which contrasts with the results obtained in this dissertation. These diverging findings may be related to the policy venue studied and the different policy needs of elected and public officials. Whereas elected officials are more worried about the representative nature of interest groups vis-a-vis their constituencies, public officials (particularly in the Commission) prioritize specialized knowledge and efficient policy input (Majone, 1999a). Importantly, this picture of expertise-based interest groups as the actors dominating access to administrative officials and bureaucratic agencies has also been observed at the national level (Beyers & Braun, 2014). To further unveil the unequal policy needs of administrative and political officials, future research could empirically assess how interest groups' organizational dimensions and policy capacities (unequally) affect their political relevance across policy venues.

Last, the generalizability of the findings related to Chapters III and V might be affected by the sampling procedure and the focus on prominent groups – i.e., groups that are on top of public officials' mind when working on specific policy issues (Fraussen et al., 2018; Grossmann, 2012; Halpin & Fraussen, 2017a; Ibenskas & Bunea, 2020). Although not always the case, these prominent groups are often older and more resourceful groups that have developed complex organizational structures. More importantly, exploratory data shows that there is a higher incidence of transmission belts among prominent groups, particularly if we compare it with the number of groups that are organizationally equipped to function as transmission belts identified in Chapter II (see Note n.44 below). Consequently, the incidence of groups organized as transmission belts in Chapters III and V is likely to be higher compared to the full population of groups mobilized at the EU level. This may also affect the organizational capacities available to prominent groups, as transmission belts are arguably more likely to possess both analytical and political capacities. Future research should systematically assess whether and to what extent did this transmission belt function mattered to obtain the privileged status of prominent groups – which is conceptually and empirically different from having higher levels of access (for a discussion on this, see Fraussen et al., 2018; Halpin & Fraussen, 2017a). Additionally, the results of Chapters III and V need further validation by considering larger and more diverse population of groups that are less relevant for public officials (i.e., non-prominent groups).

6.3 Research agenda

Drawing on the findings and the limitations presented in the previous sections, the following paragraphs highlight four potentially interesting research avenues that could further contribute to the advancement of our understanding of the intermediary role that interest groups play in our democratic systems. The first avenue calls for more comprehensively

examining the transmission belt ideal conceptualized in this dissertation by bringing in the perspective of members and the broader public opinion. Secondly, as noted in different sections of the dissertation, it is still necessary to explicitly connect the organizational structure of interest groups with their ability to produce and supply certain policy capacities. Third, more attention is needed on the receiving end of the transmission belt ideal. By paying attention to the decision-making choices of public officials through a behavioral lens, we can also examine how these actors affect interest groups' internal structures and their ability to function as transmission belts. Last, building on several findings of this dissertation, as well as on the interest group literature, it seems necessary to provide context to the transmission belt function of groups. In that regard, additional research should examine the intermediary role of groups while considering both the policy issue and the environmental context in which it takes place. The next paragraphs discuss each point in more detail.

First, this dissertation examines the transmissive function of interest groups through an organizational-level perspective, that is, focusing on the internal mechanisms put in place that are expected to facilitate the involvement of members and the efficient transmission of policy input to policymakers. This organizational focus draws on a specific understanding of the representative function of groups, which requires certain involvement and authorization of the members to the group and the group leaders. While valuable, this approach can be enriched by paying attention to both the preferences of members and of the public opinion in general. Regarding the link with the members, future research could focus on the relationship between organizational attributes and the actual representation of members and the groups' constituency. That is, we still need to examine in detail whether the presence or absence of those organizational attributes that facilitate the direct and active involvement of members in the group affect the level of satisfaction that members have with the preferences advanced by the group (see Kröger, 2018). In other words, to what extent does the investment in the two organizational dimensions related to the transmission belt ideal facilitate the representation and the satisfaction of the members in group?

As for the link with the public opinion, previous research has assessed the transmissive role of interest groups by focusing on their level of congruence with public opinion at the aggregate level (Gilens & Page, 2014; e.g., Gray, Lowery, Fellowes, & Mcatee, 2004; Lax & Phillips, 2012; Rasmussen et al., 2014), and more recent studies have found that cause groups are more capable to transfer the preferences of the public than sectional groups (Flöthe, 2020; Flöthe & Rasmussen, 2018; Klüver & Pickup, 2019). Despite their importance, these studies do not enable us to know whether and why individual groups function as transmission belts between their members and policymakers – regardless of whether the position of groups is congruent with that of the general public. As succinctly posed by Willems and De Bruycker (2019, 2) 'policy position of an interest group's constituency

may collide with public opinion'. Therefore, there is potential for highly relevant research that combines both perspectives. Willems and De Bruycker (2019), for instance have already shown how groups that more actively involve their members are less likely to have congruent positions with the public. The combination of these two perspectives raises relevant questions from both an empirical and normative point of view. For instance, how do investments in both member involvement and organizational capacity affect the likelihood to have congruent positions with the public? And, to what extent should groups represent preferences of the public, or should they only focus on the preferences of their specific set of members? Relatedly, this approach would enable us to assess what public officials prioritize when working on policy issues: interest groups whose positions are aligned with the general public, or groups that function as a transmission belt and are focused on transmitting preferences of their specific constituency.

Second, this dissertation assumes that the organizational structure of interest groups affects the possession of policy capacities, and subsequently, their level of access and influence in policy making processes. Policy capacities are not natural to interest groups; thus, they must be consciously worked out and developed. As highlighted by Levesque and Murray (2012, p. 333), 'whether capacities are indeed developed is contingent on the extent to which they fit the organizational logic of the group itself'. Hence, interest groups have to establish organizational forms and develop policy capacities that fit the strategies and goals of the group. Similarly, Halpin (2014, p. 59), argues that 'identifying the forms in which groups survive will tell us something about the specific capacities of given groups', and adds that policy capacities are not naturally endowed, but have to be generated purposefully by groups. Therefore, the ability of groups to generate policy capacities is related to how they are organized (Albareda & Braun, 2019; Halpin, 2014). This dissertation represents a stepping-stone towards additional work that links organizational features (and the ability to function as a transmission belt) with the policy capacities that groups possess. However, the premise that there is a relationship between member involvement and political capacities as well as between organizational capacity and analytical capacity, needs to be further explored and empirically tested.

Third, a question that deserves further attention in the field of interest groups relates to the receiving end of the transmission belt metaphor, in this case, policymakers. As shown in Chapter V, some groups have higher levels of perceived influence on public officials for reasons other than the resources and policy capacities they can bring to the table. Based on this finding it is important to further explore how policymakers perceive interest groups, why particular groups are granted more access or achieve a prominent status and what are the implications for their level of success and influence in policymaking processes (Jones, 2003; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; Simon, 1997). In other words, public officials are crucial actors that take (boundedly) rational decisions when working on public policies, and this ultimately affects which voices are being heard and taken into account. By

paying attention to the behavioral dimension of public officials, future research can also examine the implications of policymakers' choices on interest groups' internal structures. We know that government – interest groups relations affect the organizational development of groups (Fraussen, 2014), yet we miss systematic research addressing how public officials' decision-making choices shape the internal structures of groups and their ability to relay the demands and preferences of their members to policymakers. In other words, to what extent do public officials (deliberatively or not) promote the development of organizational features related to the transmission belt ideal?

Last, Chapters III and V show that context matters for both the ability to function as transmission belt and the likelihood to become politically relevant. Interest groups do not operate in vacuum and the dynamics they encounter in their environment shape how they organize themselves and their chances of success. More specifically, these two chapters respectively show how the level of internal conflict and salience of policy issues affect the intensity with which members are involved in establishing policy positions and the degree of importance of political capacities to be perceived as more influential among public officials. Based on this important observation, future research should pay attention to meso- and macro-level factors related to the context in which interest group operate. At the meso-level, policy issue characteristics have been taken into account to study interest group's strategies, tactics and access or influence (Bernhagen et al., 2015; Klüver et al., 2015). However, aligned with the findings presented here, policy issue characteristics such as conflict, salience and complexity may shape how interest groups internally establish policy positions, and thus their representative potential. Additionally, public officials demand different policy capacities from interest groups depending on the nature of the policy issue. Consequently, the organizational ability to function as a transmission belt and the capacity to supply key information demanded in the specific context may make a difference to gain access and influence to policymakers.

At the macro-level, it is important to pay attention at population dynamics and particularly at how issues of competition, adaptation, as well as isomorphic forces coming from the environment shape interest groups' organizational structure and their political relevance (Gray & Lowery, 1996; Lowery, 2007). Beyond survival and disbandment (Gray & Lowery, 1996; Halpin & Thomas, 2012b; Jordan & Greenan, 2012), a population approach to the study of interest groups is relevant to micro-level dynamics of how interest groups develop, which organizational forms they establish, and to what extent are they influential in policymaking processes. More specifically, a key assumption of population ecology and niche theories is that interest groups compete for scarce resources in order to survive (Fisker, 2015; Nownes, 2004). In that regard, the level of competition for members and for attention among public officials is expected to shape the internal functioning of interest groups, who are expected to invest in those attributes that more effectively grant their survival. Competition logics are likely to determine what interest groups do

and prioritize, from their mobilization efforts to their lobbying activities (Lowery, Gray, Kirkland, & Harden, 2012), and, in turn, they are likely to affect their organizational structure and their ability to function as a transmission belt. Building upon the work of this dissertation and to further understand why interest groups organize themselves as they do, future research should examine how the environmental pressures and in particular the competition for members and political attention affects the intermediary function of interest groups in democratic systems.

6.4 Implications for interest groups, public officials, and for society at large

The findings and conclusions of this dissertation have a number of relevant implications for practitioners working in interest groups as well as for (EU) public officials. More broadly, the results also highlight relevant issues that have implications for society at large.

For practitioners working in interest groups, the dissertation shows the different forms and shapes that organizations can take by focusing on the two dimensions related to the transmission belt ideal. Equally importantly, the qualitative data points towards the long-standing assumption that functioning as a transmission belt is a complex balancing exercise that is neither easy nor cheap (see, Fraussen, Halpin, & Nownes, 2020). In that regard, the work and involvement of the leadership of the group is crucial to reconcile both dynamics and relay members' preferences to policymakers. Moreover, members and interest group leaders should be aware of the importance that formal and informal organizational attributes and processes have for member involvement in establishing policy positions, and thus for the representative potential of groups and their intermediary role.

Importantly, the results of the study signal that, in order to ensure high levels of membership representation, interest group leaders should go beyond equality principles – according to which all members have the same opportunities to participate – and be more attentive to the characteristics of the different members and their actual ability to get involved in the organization. In other words, granting an equal level playing field is not always enough, some members may face difficulties to get involved in policy discussion within the group due to their limited resources, skills and knowledge. In that regard, interest groups leaders could seek additional mechanisms to overcome the limitations that particularly less endowed members experience when participating and getting involved in the group (see, Strolovitch, 2006, 2007). For instance, leaders could reach out to those members that struggle the most, investing time in explaining and informing them about the policy issue under discussion and the different alternatives, so the disadvantaged members can make informed policy decisions. Despite requiring extra time and effort, this measure could strengthen the representative role of groups and thus its intermediary function.

According to the results, a pragmatic interest group leader that exclusively seeks to gain more access to EU public officials, should primarily invest in having more organizational

capacity related to professional attributes. However, when it comes to reaching prominent status among public officials and being perceived as more influential, practitioners should be aware that the investment in policy capacities related to member involvement and democratic qualities of the group become equally important. In that regard, the time-consuming and cumbersome process of ensuring the involvement can also be rewarding in terms of political relevance and success.

If we translate these findings for the receiving end of the transmission belts metaphor, i.e., public officials of the Commission, the results show that public officials meet more frequently with groups with professionalized structures. Therefore, Commission officials could be more attentive to how interest groups are internally organized and particularly the extent to which they invest in organizational attributes to involve their members. For instance, when meeting for the first time, public officials could specifically ask the groups' representative how do they ensure that the message they convey is representing their membership-base. This not only ensures that the policy input provided is legitimate, it also enhances future compliance of legislations by all the members of the group. Public officials' limited attention to the internal organization and representation of groups is surprising given the rhetoric of the Commission and the EU more generally, and its stated preferences to engage with "representative associations". Nonetheless, this pessimistic picture is more nuanced when focusing on prominent groups who, according to the data, have the organizational attributes and the policy capacities related to the transmission belt metaphor. These contrasting findings seem to indicate that public officials follow different logics when granting access than when attributing prominent status to interest groups. Public officials and the EU more generally, could consider the creation of more consistent and strict guidelines that regulate the interaction with interest groups and that, in one way or another, take into account the ability of groups to effectively represent their members and constituency.

What does all this mean for society at large? The EU is frequently criticized for being disconnected, or at least distant from the citizens for whom it regulates and governs. Different initiatives put in place by the Commission since the beginning of the 2000s have been aimed at addressing this democratic deficit and at partially filling the gap between the EU and its citizens by engaging with civil society organization, "representative associations", and interest groups. In that regard, the involvement and participation of interest groups, particularly those that have a multi-layered and nested structure, is crucial to facilitate the engagement and participation of different societal interests in EU policymaking processes. However, as shown in this dissertation, not all groups are organizationally equipped to function as transmission belts, and those that reconcile the tensions related to investing in member involvement and organizational capacity, not always have more success among EU officials. In that regard, the dissertation shows how the EU still has ample room for improvement when it comes to promoting representative groups by, as indicated

above, paying more attention to the internal organizational features that facilitate the intermediary role of groups. Importantly, this would not only reinforce the legitimacy and democratic credentials of the Commission and the EU, it would also reinforce the 'European spirit' among different societal interest and interest group members, who would be actively involved and interact through EU level groups. More specifically, by creating incentives for groups to involve their members, interest groups can become active organizations that foster social capital among members, who, through the exchange of information, experiences and opinions, develop a feeling of ownership in the associations, and a sense of belonging to a European community which in turns reinforces an active involvement in EU policymaking issues.

To a certain extent, the transmission belt ideal can be seen as a response to the long-standing debate on democracy vs. technocracy at the EU level (Wallace & Smith, 1995). On the one hand, the EU needs to reinforce its connection with the citizens, yet it also needs expertise and efficient responses to develop sound and effective legislations. As succinctly noted by Braun and Busuioc (2020, p. 1601) 'addressing contemporary societal challenges and many of the regulatory [and legislative] conundrums associated with them calls simultaneously for independent expertise necessarily grounded in the much-needed audience support that underpins regulatory authority'. This double requirement of possessing expert-based knowledge while enjoying the support of the set of actors targeted or affected by a particular legislation is perfectly reflected in the transmission belt ideal: groups organized as intermediary actors are prepared to enhance the connection with their constituency and (lay) members, who have a say and can shape the avenues of the group; yet, at the same time groups are capable of producing and processing expert based knowledge that is thoroughly discussed with the members and efficiently transferred to public officials involved in policymaking processes. In doing so, groups that are effectively organized as transmission belts might be better positioned to supply relevant policy input to policymakers dealing with complex societal challenges that require both: expertise and legitimacy. In summary, a stronger emphasis on interest groups' balancing exercise of involving members and having professionalized structures can benefit the governance system of the EU.

6.5 Conclusions

This dissertation demonstrates the relevance of unpacking interest groups by analyzing their internal ability to function as transmission belts that relay their members with public officials. The crucial role of interest groups in contemporary governance systems calls for systematic and thorough evaluations that enable us to assess interest groups' intermediary role between societal interests and policymakers. As illustrated in the introduction of this dissertation, public officials often reach out to groups due to their ability to represent specific constituencies, yet interest groups struggle to balance and reconcile their ability to

connect with their members while being politically active. To improve our understanding of the intermediary role of interest groups in democratic systems, this dissertation opens the black box and assess how interest groups involve their members, the organizational attributes they put in place to efficiently interact with public officials, the type of policy capacities they possess, and the implications of all these elements for their political relevance among public officials. In that regard, this study provides important and contemporary insights to the long-lasting questions put forward by Schattschneider in 1935, namely: how do we know that those claiming to act on behalf of members in the pressure system are in fact representing their interests?

Notes

- 43 As argued in the introduction, the organizational structure of interest is linked to the type of policy capacities they possess and can offer to public officials. Using 2-Capture project data from 39 interest groups for which there was information available from interest group representatives and public officials, an analysis has been conducted to explore the relationships between (1) member involvement and political capacities and (2) organizational capacity and analytical capacities. Importantly, the tests rely on a different operationalization of the dimensions “member involvement” and “organizational capacity”, which are focused on the extent to which the members and the in-house staff respectively were actively involved in establishing policy positions. The results of a regression analyses, also controlling for whether the observations are business or citizen groups, indicate that there is a positive and significant relationship between involving members and having political capacities as well as between having organizational capacities and analytical capacities. These preliminary results call for future research that further explores the relationship between internal organization and policy capacities in a more systematic manner. Yet, it also confirms the expected relations between different organizational dimensions and policy capacities advanced in the introduction.
- 44 Based on available data from “2-Capture: stakeholder interviews”, 21 out of 27 organizations included in Chapter III (i.e., 78%) are categorized as transmission belts that highly invest in ‘member involvement for representation’ and in ‘organizational capacity to interact with policymakers’. Similarly, 23 out of 32 (i.e., 72%) membership-based groups mentioned by public officials and included in Chapter V are also categorized as transmission belts because they highly invest in ‘member involvement for representation’ and in ‘organizational capacity to interact with policymakers’.

VII

Appendices

7.1 APPENDIX TO CHAPTER II

7.1.1 Selected Questions of the INTEREURO Interest Group Survey

Member involvement

- Interaction:

Does your organization have a general assembly or an annual general meeting?

- Decision-making:

Organizations like yours can make decisions in different ways, such as consensus among individual members or board members or by voting procedures. Can you please indicate below how your organization primarily makes decisions in the following areas?

	<u>Consensus among members</u>	<u>Voting among the members</u>	<u>Consensus in board</u>	<u>Voting in the board</u>	<u>Senior staff take these decisions</u>	<u>Other</u>
<i>Establishing your organization's position on policy issues</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>
<i>Deciding on advocacy/lobbying strategies and tactics</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>

- Local chapters:

Does your organization have local or regional chapters?

Organizational capacity

- Autonomy:

Organizations like yours can make decisions in different ways, such as consensus among individual members or board members or by voting procedures. Can you please indicate below how your organization primarily makes decisions in the following areas?

	<u>Consensus among members</u>	<u>Voting among the members</u>	<u>Consensus in board</u>	<u>Voting in the board</u>	<u>Senior staff take these decisions</u>	<u>Other</u>
<i>Budget</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>
<i>Hiring staff</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>

- Centralization:

Thinking about your organization's position on EU policies, how would you rate the relative influence of the following actors?

	<i>Very influential</i>	<i>Somewhat influential</i>	<i>Not very influential</i>	<i>Not at all influential</i>
<i>Executive director</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>
<i>Chair of the board</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>
<i>The board of directors/executive committee</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>

Thinking about your organization's decisions on advocacy and lobbying tactics, how would you rate the relative influence of the following actors?

	<i>Very influential</i>	<i>Somewhat influential</i>	<i>Not very influential</i>	<i>Not at all influential</i>
<i>Executive director</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>
<i>Chair of the board</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>
<i>The board of directors/executive committee</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>

- Functional differentiation:

Does your organization have committees for specific tasks?

7.1.2 Figures and Tables

FIGURE A1. Dendrogram for Ward's Linkage Cluster Analysis

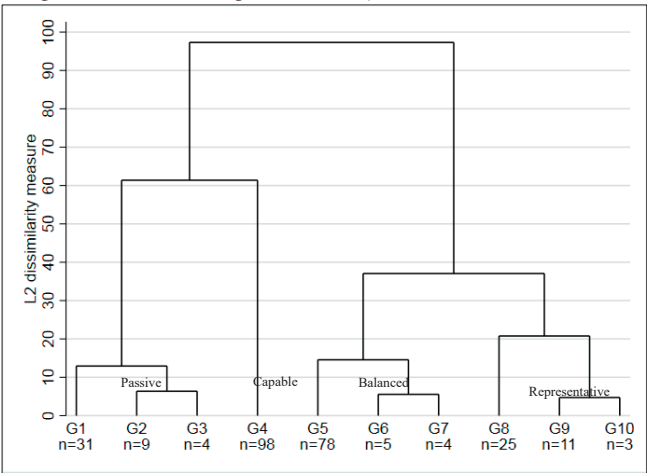


FIGURE A2. Scatter Plot of CSOs by Cluster (Weighted by %)

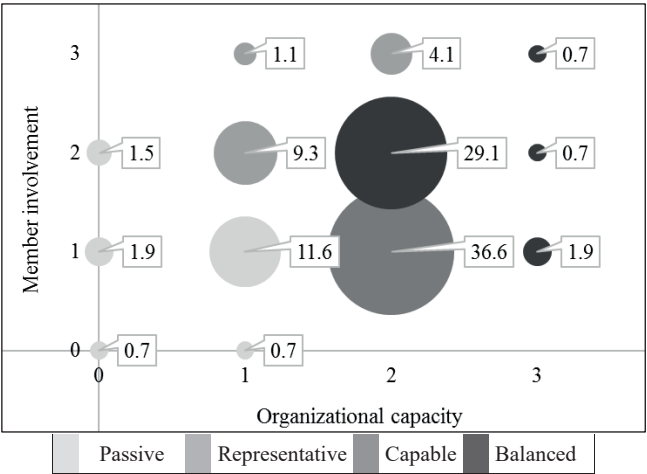


TABLE AI. Correlation Matrix of Organizational Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Member involvement	1						
2. Interaction	.4094*	1					
3. Decision-making	.6863*	.0042	1				
4. Local chapters	.5606*	.0344	-.0603	1			
5. Organizational capacity	.1082	.2145*	.0542	-.0182	1		
6. Autonomy	-.052	-.1702*	-.076	.0711	.3217*	1	
7. Centralization	.061	.1881*	.0626	-.0909	.6633*	-.0196	1
8. Functional differentiation	.1354*	.3044*	-.0019	.0987*	.7047*	-.0889	.1508*

* $p < .05$

TABLE AII. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix of the Four Clusters and Explanatory Factors

Variables	Mean (S.D.)	Min-Max	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Passive	.164 (.371)	0-1	1							
2. Responsive	.145 (.353)	0-1	-.182*	1						
3. Capable	.365 (.482)	0-1	-.336*	-.313*	1					
4. Balanced	.324 (.469)	0-1	-.307*	-.286*	-.526*	1				
5. CSO type	.559 (.497)	0-1	-.114	.004	.065	.021	1			
6. Organizational age	30.667 (25.409)	3-168	-.135*	.031	.063	.021	.174*	1		
7. Resources (FTE)	16.862 (70.543)	0-1,000	-.029	.218*	-.059	-.083	.015	.188*	1	
8. Organizational Scope	.843 (.364)	0-1	-.031	-.055	-.014	.080	-.093	-.205*	-.224*	1
9. Membership diversity	2.123 (1.258)	0-6	-.011	.052	.074	-.106	-.212*	-.134*	.093	.075

* $p < .05$

7.2 APPENDIX TO CHAPTER III

Table A1(a). Descriptive overview of categorical variables (N (%))

Economic groups	23 (72%)
Citizen groups	9 (28%)
Type of members: Individual organizations	12 (37%)
Type of members: National associations	15 (47%)
Type of members: Individual organizations & National associations	5 (16%)
Headquarters in Belgium	27 (84%)
Policy domain: Agriculture & Fisheries	5 (16%)
Policy domain: Trade	3 (9%)
Policy domain: Environment & Social affairs	4 (13%)
Policy domain: Finance	4 (13%)
Policy domain: Health	3 (9%)
Policy domain: Transport	8 (25%)
Policy domain: Utilities	5 (16%)
Scope: Europe	29 (87%)
Scope: International	3 (13%)
Members active in setting policy positions	
<i>Not at all involved</i>	0 (0%)
<i>Little involved</i>	3 (9.5%)
<i>Somewhat involved</i>	3 (9.5%)
<i>Considerably involved</i>	16 (50%)
<i>Extremely involved</i>	10 (31%)
To what extent do members have similar resources	
<i>Very different</i>	21 (65.6%)
<i>Different</i>	4 (12.5%)
<i>Similar</i>	4 (12.5%)
<i>Very similar</i>	3 (9.5%)

Table A1(b). Descriptive overview of numerical variables (Mean (S.D.))

Age (years)	35.94 (20.22)
Resources (FTE lobbying according to Transparency Register)	6.3 (5.97)
Number of members (i.e., individual organizations and associations)	35.54 (23.94)

7.3 APPENDIX TO CHAPTER IV

7.3.1 Selected Questions of the INTEREURO Interest Group Survey

Member involvement

- Interaction among members:

Does your organization have a general assembly or an annual general meeting?

- Decision-making procedure:

Organizations like yours can make decisions in different ways, such as consensus among individual members or board members or by voting procedures. Can you please indicate below how your organization primarily makes decisions in the following areas?

	<u>Consensus among members</u>	<u>Voting among the members</u>	Consensus in board	Voting in the board	Senior staff take these decisions	Other
<i>Establishing your organization's position on policy issues</i>	O	O	O	O	O	O
<i>Deciding on advocacy/lobbying strategies and tactics</i>	O	O	O	O	O	O

Note: These two items of the questionnaire have been grouped based on the results of a principal component analysis and confirmed by a Cronbach's alpha test of reliability ($\alpha = 0.72$).

- Local branches:

Does your organization have local or regional chapters?

Organizational capacity

- Autonomy:

Organizations like yours can make decisions in different ways, such as consensus among individual members or board members or by voting procedures. Can you please indicate below how your organization primarily makes decisions in the following areas?

	Consensus among members	Voting among the members	Consensus in board	Voting in the board	Senior staff take these decisions	Other
<i>Budget</i>	O	O	O	O	O	O
<i>Hiring staff</i>	O	O	O	O	O	O

• Centralization:

Thinking about your organization's position on EU policies, how would you rate the relative influence of the following actors?

	<i>Very influential</i>	<i>Somewhat influential</i>	<i>Not very influential</i>	<i>Not at all influential</i>
<i>Executive director</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>
<i>Chair of the board</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>
<i>The board of directors/executive committee</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>

Thinking about your organization's decisions on advocacy and lobbying tactics, how would you rate the relative influence of the following actors?

	<i>Very influential</i>	<i>Somewhat influential</i>	<i>Not very influential</i>	<i>Not at all influential</i>
<i>Executive director</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>
<i>Chair of the board</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>
<i>The board of directors/executive committee</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>

Note: These six items have been grouped after examining the data with a principal component analysis and estimating the reliability of the construct ($\alpha = 0.79$).

• Functional differentiation:

Does your organization have committees for specific tasks?

Table A0. Cronbach's alpha and correlation matrix of items in the two explanatory variables (n=272)

		1	2	3	4	5
Member involvement ($\alpha = 0.085$)	1.Interaction among members					
	2.Decision-making procedure		-.024			
	3.Local branches		-.002	-.056		
Organizational capacity ($\alpha = 0.214$)	4.Autonomy		-.011	-.038	.055	
	5.Centralization		-.105	.117*	-.063	-.014
	6.Functional differentiation		.170*	.016	.026	-.133* .101

Note: the low scores of the Cronbach's alphas (α) confirm that the two explanatory factors are multi-dimensional 'composites'.

7.3.2 Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix

Table A1. Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix of dependent variable and explanatory factors

	Mean (S.D.)	Min-Max	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.Level of access to the Commission	8.204 (15.431)	1-116	-								
2.Member involvement	1.486 (0.643)	0-3	0.035	-							
3.Organizational capacity	1.797 (.481)	0-3	0.199*	0.099	-						
4.Transmission belt	0.372 (0.485)	0-1	0.079	0.785*	0.391*	-					
5.Group type	0.546 (0.499)	0-1	-0.062	0.155	0.077	0.203*	-				
6.Organizational scale	0.893 (0.310)	0-1	0.069	0.059	0.217*	0.128	-0.001	-			
7.Scope of activity	4.888 (3.294)	1-15	0.122	0.086	-0.049	-0.092	-0.225*	-0.164	-		
8. Membership diversity	1.883 (1.133)	1-5	-0.098	-0.192*	-0.094	-0.298*	-0.154	-0.075	0.267*	-	
9.Organizational age	31.593 (28.534)	3-168	0.014	0.085	-0.130	-0.025	0.024	-0.253*	0.287*	-0.092	-
10.Resources (FTE)	16.790 (46.058)	0-500	0.116	0.139	-0.185	-0.078	-0.006	-0.473*	0.180	0.122	0.328*

*p < 0.05

7.3.3 Robustness checks

This appendix presents several checks that have been conducted in order to confirm the results presented in Tables 4.2 and 4.3 in Chapter IV. Firstly, to account for a potential over-estimation of the models presented in the paper, Models 1 in Table A2 show how the main results hold when excluding all the control variables. Secondly, to provide a more contextualized analyses, Models 2 in Table A2 control for the policy domain in which groups have access (Klüver et al., 2015). According to the results, investing in organizational capacity is relevant across economic and non-economic domains. Thirdly, results also hold when controlling for whether groups seek access to the Commission and for the extent to which they include their potential constituency (see Models 1 and 2 in Table A3). The extent to which interest groups seek access is an important control as some groups may function as clubs that do not intend to interact with public officials (Braun, 2012; Schmitter & Streeck, 1999) or may prioritize outside lobbying strategies (Binderkrantz, 2005). The level of representativeness is also important since it relates to the transmissive belt function and affects legislative access of interest groups (Junk, 2019a; Kohler-Koch et al., 2017). The inclusion of these two variables does not affect the main results. Fourthly, an OLS regressions using survey data as dependent variable has been conducted. More specifically, the dependent variable indicates the ‘frequency of access to the Commission via public consultations, advisory meetings and presenting reports’. Again, results hold, and only organizational capacity is positively and significantly related to the frequency of access to the Commission (see Table A4).

To confirm the results while accounting for the organizations without access, Tables A5, A6 and A7 include alternative models. Firstly, Table A5 replicates the models in Table 2 of the manuscript but including the interest groups with “zero” meetings with public officials. The coefficients and p-values are almost identical to the ones reported in the manuscript, confirming the robustness of the results. Secondly, Table A6 presents the results of zero-inflated negative binomial regression that assumes that the zero outcome is due to two different processes – binomial and negative binomial distributions. Zero-inflated negative binomial accounts for both the structural and sampling zeros, therefore, the two components of the mixture distribution are estimated simultaneously. However, as noted by Rasmussen and Gross (2015), ‘it is not theoretically clear which substantive factor/s predict whether a group always (or only sometimes) has the value of zero’. In this case, the models reported in Table A6 only consider group type, organizational age and resources, together with the main explanatory variables, as the predictors of the logit model – the models fail to converge when adding additional controls. It is worth noting that when comparing the models from Table A5 and Table A6 using the BIC and AIC, the negative binomial models (i.e., the ones in Table A5), are preferred over zero-inflated negative binomial reported in Table A6. Despite not being the preferred method, the

second-step of the model confirms the results related to the main explanatory variables as presented in the manuscript.

Table A7 present the results of a Heckman two step selection model. This approach involves estimation of a probit model for selection, followed by the insertion of a correction factor—the inverse Mills ratio, calculated from the probit model—into the second OLS model of interest. Due to the overdispersion of the dependent variable (i.e., level of access), OLS is not the most appropriate model, yet the results presented in Table A7 confirm the ones discussed in the paper. Importantly, the probit model is the same for all the models. To avoid inflated standard errors due to multicollinearity resulting from the use of the same factors in the selection and regression equations, the factors included in this first step are not the same as the ones included in the second step of the model (Bushway, Johnson, & Slocum, 2007; Moffitt, 1999; Puhani, 2000). To circumvent the multicollinearity issue, and aligned with the goals of the paper, the hypotheses are tested at the second level of the selection model.

Last, Table A8 includes a model with all the individual items related to the transmission belt ideal. As can be seen, the items related to member involvement are not significantly related to the level of access. In fact, one of the items (i.e., local branches) is significantly and negatively related to the likelihood of gaining higher degrees of access to public officials. In contrast, the items related to the organizational capacity dimensions are positively and significantly related to the degree of access that interest groups obtain to EU public officials – the only exception if functional differentiation that is close to significant levels (p-value = 0.149).

Table A2. Models without controls and full model controlling for policy domain

	Main model without controls			Models with policy domains as controls ^a		
	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 1c	Model 2a	Model 2b	Model 2c
Membership involvement	-0.003 (0.184)		0.086 (0.317)	-0.212 (0.152)		-0.353 (0.267)
Organizational capacity	0.782*** (0.231)		0.843*** (0.289)	0.578*** (0.191)		0.494** (0.231)
Transmission belt		0.313 (0.241)	-0.159 (0.452)		0.085 (0.200)	0.235 (0.368)
Group type: Non-business (REF)						
Group type: Business				-0.254 (0.192)	-0.206 (0.197)	-0.245 (0.192)
Org. scale: (Sub) National assns. (REF)						
Org. scale: European or Int'l assns.				0.442 (0.307)	0.416 (0.316)	0.445 (0.305)
Scope of activity				0.019 (0.032)	0.021 (0.034)	0.024 (0.033)
Membership diversity				-0.264*** (0.089)	-0.245*** (0.093)	-0.256*** (0.089)
Organizational age				0.002 (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)	0.002 (0.004)
Resources (FTE)				0.004 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	0.004 (0.002)
Policy domain: Economy				1.872*** (0.212)	1.931*** (0.222)	1.860*** (0.212)
Policy domain: Others				1.766*** (0.262)	1.952*** (0.268)	1.786*** (0.264)
Constant	0.662 (0.498)	2.021*** (0.148)	0.472 (0.732)	-1.657*** (0.555)	-1.133*** (0.489)	-1.445** (0.646)
N	113	113	113	107	107	107
Alpha	1.326 (0.172)	1.424 (0.182)	1.325 (0.172)	0.519 (0.088)	0.589 (0.095)	0.516 (0.088)
Log likelihood	-352.452	-357.085	-352.390	-286.532	-291.212	-286.330

* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

^a Policy domain: Economic domains include the following DGs: Competition; Economic and Financial Affairs; Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union; Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs; Taxation and Customs Union; Trade. Other domains include the remaining DGs of the Commission.

Table A3. Models controlling for 'seeking access' and 'representativeness'

	Models controlling for 'seeking access' ^a			Models controlling for 'representativeness' ^b		
	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 1c	Model 2a	Model 2b	Model 2c
Membership involvement	0.143 (0.212)		-0.086 (0.323)	-0.0783 (0.193)		-0.1733 (0.348)
Organizational capacity	0.702*** (0.238)		0.571** (0.277)	0.744** (0.296)		0.666* (0.381)
Transmission belt		0.623** (0.267)	0.408 (0.452)		0.153 (0.248)	0.153 (0.472)
Group type: Non-business (REF)						
Group type: Business	-0.036 (0.265)	0.023 (0.264)	-0.033 (0.264)	-0.461* (0.240)	-0.543** (0.244)	-0.469* (0.241)
Organizational age	-0.005 (0.005)	-0.006 (0.005)	-0.004 (0.005)	0.005 (0.005)	0.006 (0.005)	0.005 (0.005)
Resources (FTE)	0.006** (0.003)	0.006** (0.003)	0.007** (0.003)	0.006** (0.003)	0.006* (0.003)	0.007** (0.003)
Seeking access	0.711*** (0.137)	.815*** (0.136)	0.714*** (0.138)			
Representativeness						
Constant	-1.879*** (0.638)	-.934* (0.530)	-1.486* 0.7718	0.326 (0.702)	1.492*** (0.405)	0.510 (0.904)
N	86	86	86	99	99	99
Alpha	0.928 (0.150)	0.987 (0.155)	0.921 (.149)	1.098 (0.160)	1.158 (0.166)	1.096 (0.160)
Log likelihood	-261.437	-263.573	-261.035	-297.207	-299.946	-297.154

* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

^a Question: How frequently did your organization seek access to the Commission? [Options: 1=We did not seek access; 2=At least once every three months; 3=At least once a month; 4=At least once a week]

^b Question: If you consider the size of your potential membership and the number of actual members, approximately what percentage of potential members are actually members of your organization? [Options: Less than 25%; Between 25 and 50%; Between 50 and 75%; More than 75%]

Table A4. OLS regression using survey data as dependent variables^a

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Membership involvement	-0.074 (0.086)		-0.073 (0.126)
Organizational capacity	0.278*** (0.088)		0.278*** (0.101)
Transmission belt		0.082 (0.115)	-0.001 (0.183)
Group type: Non-business (REF)			
Group type: Business	0.168 (0.111)	0.183 (0.114)	0.168 (0.112)
Org. scale: (Sub)National assns. (REF)			
Org. scale: European or Int'l assns.	0.241* (0.138)	0.266* (0.140)	0.241* (0.138)
Scope of activity	0.079*** (0.017)	0.076*** (0.018)	0.079*** (0.017)
Membership diversity	-0.034 (0.043)	-0.026 (0.044)	-0.034 (0.043)
Organizational age	0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)
Resources (FTE)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
Constant	1.336*** (0.254)	1.652*** (0.207)	1.335*** (0.298)
N	197	197	197
R-square	0.163	0.120	0.163

* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

^a Questions to measure level of access: How frequently did your organization gained access to the Commission via (1) public consultations, (2) advisory meetings and (3) presenting reports? [Options: 1=We did not do this; 2=At least once; 3=At least once every three months; 4=At least once a month; 5=At least once a week]

Table A5. Negative binomial regression (including zeros)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Membership involvement	-0.168 (0.284)		-0.232 (0.260)		-0.218 (0.399)
Organizational capacity		1.044*** (0.289)	1.056*** (0.287)		1.066*** (0.361)
Transmission belt				0.265 (0.330)	-0.0251 (0.542)
Group type: Non-business (REF)					
Group type: Business	0.408 (0.315)	0.127 (0.306)	0.192 (0.313)	0.289 (0.318)	0.191 (0.313)
Org. scale: (Sub)National associations (REF)					
Org. scale: European or Int'l asns.	1.338*** (0.447)	1.150*** (0.431)	1.201*** (0.432)	1.258*** (0.449)	1.201*** (0.432)
Scope of activity	0.177*** (0.061)	0.160*** (0.056)	0.159*** (0.055)	0.181*** (0.062)	0.158*** (0.056)
Membership diversity	-0.412*** (0.159)	-0.429*** (0.148)	-0.450*** (0.149)	-0.366** (0.159)	-0.451*** (0.151)
Organizational age	-0.012* (0.007)	-0.010 (0.007)	-0.010 (0.007)	-0.012 (0.007)	-0.010 (0.007)
Resources (FTE)	0.023** (0.009)	0.018** (0.008)	0.018** (0.008)	0.023** (0.010)	0.018** (0.008)
Constant	-0.195 (0.775)	-1.948*** (0.740)	-1.655** (0.803)	-0.558 (0.670)	-1.679* (0.952)
N	272	272	272	272	272
lnlpha	1.633*** (0.126)	1.549*** (0.129)	1.543*** (0.129)	1.630*** (0.126)	1.543*** (0.129)
Log likelihood	-466.868	-461.050	-460.661	-466.713	-460.660

* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Table A6. Zero-inflated negative binomial

	Logit component					Negative binomial component				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 1b	Model 2b	Model 3b	Model 4b	Model 5b
Membership involvement	-1.27 (0.853)		-1.113 (0.892)		-1.105 (0.889)	-0.375 (0.277)		-0.384 (0.260)		-0.331 (0.418)
Organizational capacity		-0.262 (0.975)	-0.342 (0.999)		-0.299 (1.042)		0.977*** (0.341)	0.952*** (0.334)		0.999** (0.443)
Transmission belt				-1.176 (1.085)					0.0326 (0.338)	-0.0913 (0.559)
Group type: Non-business (REF)										
Group type: Business	-0.451 (0.817)	-0.938 (0.770)	-0.439 (0.877)	-0.744 (0.771)	-0.452 (0.875)	0.437 (0.325)	0.006 (0.312)	0.212 (0.332)	0.259 (0.328)	0.205 (0.335)
Org. scale: (Sub)National associations (REF)										
Org. scale: European or International associations						1.357*** (0.413)	1.162*** (0.393)	1.248*** (0.400)	1.242*** (0.415)	1.248*** (0.400)
Scope of activity						0.173*** (0.058)	0.1403*** (0.054)	0.149*** (0.0530)	0.167*** (0.0597)	0.147*** (0.0545)
Membership diversity						-0.469*** (0.145)	-0.451*** (0.138)	-0.474*** (0.137)	-0.442*** (0.150)	-0.478*** (0.139)
Organizational age	0.020 (0.020)	0.035 (0.023)	0.026 (0.021)	0.026 (0.021)	0.0257 (0.0213)	-0.012* (0.007)	-0.006 (0.007)	-0.009 (0.007)	-0.010 (0.007)	-0.009 (0.007)
Resources (FTE)	-0.973*** (0.359)	-0.778*** (0.281)	-0.960** (0.380)	-0.894*** (0.322)	-0.957*** (0.376)	0.013** (0.006)	0.010*** (0.004)	0.012** (0.005)	0.012* (0.006)	0.012** (0.005)
Constant	3.036** (1.512)	1.141 (1.887)	3.180 (2.244)	1.392 (0.878)	3.103 (2.312)	0.645 (0.689)	-1.349* (0.813)	-0.866 (0.845)	0.185 (0.643)	-0.971 (1.063)
Lalpha	1.276*** (0.162)	1.192*** (0.165)	1.201*** (0.169)	1.289*** (0.162)	1.199*** (0.168)	1.276*** (0.162)	1.192*** (0.165)	1.201*** (0.169)	1.289*** (0.162)	1.199*** (0.168)
Log likelihood	-456.623	-452.166	-450.717	-457.360	-452.166	-456.623	-452.166	-450.717	-457.360	-452.166

N= 272; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Table A7. Heckman two-step selection model

	Probit model (1 st step)	OLS models (2 nd step)			
		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 5
Membership involvement		-1.840 (2.836)		-2.279 (2.784)	-2.504 (4.839)
Organizational capacity			7.716** (3.673)	7.935** (3.673)	7.812* (4.227)
Transmission belt				0.671 (3.612)	0.375 (6.593)
Group type: Non-business (REF)					
Group type: Business	0.284* (0.157)				
Org. scale: (Sub)National associations (REF)					
Org. scale: European or International associations		5.072 (5.454)	1.045** (0.513)	2.899 (5.431)	4.353 (5.417)
Scope of activity		1.118** (0.532)	2.262 (5.358)	1.123** (0.521)	1.130** (0.533)
Membership diversity		-2.827* (1.597)	-2.336 (1.526)	-2.624* (1.566)	-2.609* (1.586)
Organizational age	-0.001 (0.003)				
Resources (FTE)	0.003* (0.002)				
Constant	-0.424*** (0.145)	23.48 (15.70)	5.893 (14.69)	11.21 (16.53)	18.28 (13.90)
lambda	-17.33 (15.08)	-17.33 (15.08)	-14.65 (13.93)	-17.41 (14.86)	-14.76 (14.30)

N= 272; * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

TABLE A8. Negative binomial regression: Level of access to Commission officials

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Err.	p-value
Membership involvement			
<i>Interaction</i>	1.119	1.171	0.339
<i>Decision-making</i>	0.124	0.237	0.600
<i>Local branches</i>	-0.586	0.299	0.050
Organizational capacity			
<i>Autonomy</i>	0.918	0.498	0.065
<i>Centralization</i>	0.873	0.383	0.023
<i>Functional differentiation</i>	0.522	0.363	0.149
Group type: Non-business (REF)			
Group type: Business	-0.166	0.240	0.490
Org. scale: (Sub)National associations (REF)			
Org. scale: European or International associations	0.550	0.377	0.145
Scope of activity	0.092	0.041	0.025
Membership diversity	-0.322	0.111	0.004
Organizational age	-0.001	0.005	0.799
Resources (FTE)	0.009	0.003	0.004
Constant	0.000	0.144	
Alpha	0.999	0.143	
Log likelihood	-319.838		
N	107		

7.4 APPENDIX TO CHAPTER V

7.4.1 Interview questions

Selection of prominent interest groups: Please indicate the *key* stakeholders regarding (the issues of) this regulation/directive.

Dependent variable: Please, clarify below how decisive have been these stakeholders for the final policy outcome.

- Not at all.
- To some extent.
- To a large extent.

Explanatory variables: Which of the reasons presented below were considered as important for interacting with the key stakeholders regarding (the issues of) this regulation/directive? For each condition, indicate whether it applies or not (Randomized).

- For offering necessary policy expertise, such as technical, economic and/or legal expertise)
- For offering high quality policy input in the past
- For offering an assessment of the societal impact
- For offering political information (level of public or societal support)
- For their ability to mobilize public support
- For representing a key constituency
- For being a familiar partner to the organization
- For being one of the few alternatives
- For being a regular partner to our organization in various stakeholder bodies

Table A1. Principal Component Analysis to explore the constructs of the explanatory factors

Variables	Reasons why public official interacted with them	Loadings	
Analytical capacities	<i>For offering necessary policy expertise</i>	0.39	0.53
	<i>For offering high quality policy input in the past</i>	0.84	
	<i>For offering an assessment of the societal impact</i>	0.71	0.32
Political capacities	<i>For offering political information</i>	.38	0.63
	<i>For their ability to mobilize public support</i>		0.80
	<i>For representing a key constituency</i>	0.80	0.30
Policy insider	<i>For being a familiar partner</i>	0.30	0.70
	<i>For being one of the few alternatives</i>		0.78
	<i>For being a regular partner</i>		0.57 0.50
McDonald's omega total reliability score ^(a)		0.69	0.60 0.60

Principal Component Analysis – Rotation 'Equamax' (cut-off level ≥ 0.30)

^(a) The McDonald's omega (1999) for each variable ranges from 0.60 and 0.70, indicating that the internal consistency of the constructs is moderate, yet acceptable considering the limited number of items and their binary nature.

7.4.2 Dependent, explanatory and control variables: Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix

Table A2. Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix (*p<.05)

Variable	Source	N	Mean	Min-Max	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Perceived influence	Interview	103	2.243 (0.585)	1-3	-						
2.Analytical capacities	Interview	109	1.514 (1.042)	0-3	0.36*	-					
3.Political capacities	Interview	109	1.202 (1.034)	0-3	0.33*	0.44*	-				
4.Policy insider	Interview	109	2.009 (0.986)	0-3	-0.02	0.33*	0.19*	-			
5.Group type (Ref: Citizen groups)	Group website	109	0.633 (0.484)	0-1	-0.08	0.07	-0.18	0.03	-		
6.Membership (Ref: No-members)	Group website	109	0.853 (0.356)	0-1	-0.01	0.33	0.11	0.29*	0.17	-	
7.Advocacy Saliency (Ref: Low Saliency)	Desk research	109	0.523 (0.502)	0-1	0.19	-0.24*	-0.10	-0.16*	-0.19	-0.08	-
8.Policy domain (Ref: Non-economic)	Desk research	109	0.257 (0.440)	0-1	0.01	-0.08	-0.03	-0.35*	0.14	0.04	0.18

7.4.3 Robustness checks

Table A3 tests the hypothesis using alternative model specifications as the ones presented in the paper. More specifically, model 1 only includes the three main explanatory factors and models 2 to 4 test the interaction effects while controlling for all the explanatory factors.

Table A4 tests all the hypotheses by controlling for three additional variables. Importantly, the main effects found in our main models hold, indicating that the results are robust and that the additional controls do not moderate the relationships between our explanatory factors and the dependent variable.

At the group-level, we include organizational age and resources. Previous studies have shown that organizational age has a positive effect on the level of access that interest groups gain to public officials as older groups may have more expertise to engage in lobbying and a wider circle of contacts among public officials (Dür & Mateo, 2014). A similar effect is expected to apply when examining what determines the extent to which group are perceived as influential. The variable has been manually coded by revising the websites of the organizations included in the study. The numerical variable has been logged due to its skewed distribution. As shown in Table A4, the variable is not significantly related to how perceived influence of groups.

Resources may determine the policy capacities in hands of groups, thus affecting their perceived influence on final policy outcomes (Halpin, 2014, pp. 179–180). This variable is operationalized as the full time equivalent of people in the organization that is involved in the different activities centered on interacting with public officials of the EU. The variable has been collected from the Transparency Register website and logged transformed due to high skewed distribution. Intriguingly, we find a negative and significant effect between resources and prominent groups' perceived influence.

At the issue-level, we include complexity, as it might affect public officials' demands and the extent to which some groups are perceived more influential than others. We use Carroll's Corrected Type-Token ratio (CTTR) to capture technical complexity of the legislation included in the study (Carroll, 1964). The formula measures how many unique words (i.e., types) appear in the text in relation to the overall number of words (i.e., tokens).⁴⁵ More specifically, we rely on the text of the preamble and the full text of the legislative proposals of the Commission. The CTTR includes a term that corrects for increasing text length as the likelihood that any particular word will be repeated naturally increases as the text gets longer. A high CTTR therefore signals a high technical complexity of the text, whilst a low CTTR signals less technical complexity (see Aizenberg & Müller, 2020).

Table A5 runs the models in the manuscript while relying on alternative operationalization of the three main explanatory factors. More specifically, the items that less clearly load into the factors as reported in PCA of Table A1 have been excluded. In that regard, analytical capacities is operationalized with the items "For offering high quality policy input in

the past” and “For offering an assessment of the societal impact”; political capacities is based on the items “For offering political information” and “For their ability to mobilize public support”; lastly, policy insiders are operationalized with the items “For being a familiar partner” and “For being one of the few alternatives”.⁴⁶ As presented in Table A5, the coefficients and their p-values are very similar to the ones reported in the manuscript. The only exception is that the interaction effect between political capacities and advocacy salience becomes significant also when adding the control variables.

Lastly, Figure A1 depicts the interaction testing H4c while treating the moderating factor (i.e., advocacy salience) as a continuous variable, instead of a binary one as done in the manuscript. The figure shows how the same result applies in this case, making the results related to H4c more robust.

Table A3. Alternative model specifications

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Analytical capacities	0.272*** (0.053)	0.261*** (0.066)	0.276*** (0.053)	0.263*** (0.053)
Political capacities	0.117** (0.057)	0.130** (0.060)	0.065 (0.074)	0.136** (0.059)
Policy insider	-0.126* (0.074)	-0.124 (0.079)	-0.144* (0.079)	-0.250** (0.104)
<i>Controls</i>				
Group type		0.061 (0.102)	0.030 (0.103)	0.087 (0.102)
Membership group		-0.092 (0.123)	-0.050 (0.125)	-0.063 (0.124)
Advocacy salience		0.249 (0.228)	0.105 (0.226)	-0.143 (0.294)
Policy domain		-0.318 (0.197)	-0.313 (0.197)	-0.307* (0.184)
<i>Interaction effects</i>				
Analytical capacities * Advocacy salience		0.041 (0.088)		
Political capacities * Advocacy salience			0.150 (0.101)	
Policy insider * Advocacy salience				0.237* (0.127)
Constant	1.904*** (0.160)	1.894*** (0.241)	1.978*** (0.238)	2.089*** (0.249)
N observations	103	103	103	103
N issues	28	28	28	28
Log Likelihood	-62.989	-59.714	-58.736	-58.250
Akaike Inf. Crit.	137.979	141.427	139.472	138.500
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	153.787	170.409	168.454	167.482

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A4. Regressions with additional control variables

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Analytical capacities	0.279*** (0.061)	0.296*** (0.071)	0.279*** (0.060)	0.256*** (0.060)
Political capacities	0.150** (0.062)	0.152** (0.062)	0.094 (0.076)	0.161*** (0.060)
Policy insider	-0.131 (0.085)	-0.124 (0.086)	-0.156 (0.086)	-0.280** (0.109)
<i>Controls</i>				
Group type	0.009 (0.116)	0.010 (0.116)	-0.017 (0.117)	0.044 (0.116)
Membership group	-0.111 (0.134)	-0.115 (0.134)	-0.063 (0.139)	-0.073 (0.136)
Organizational age+	0.049 (0.078)	0.047 (0.078)	0.052 (0.077)	0.069 (0.079)
Resources+	-0.072 ⁺ (0.040)	-0.075 ⁺ (0.040)	-0.068 ⁺ (0.039)	-0.072 ⁺ (0.040)
Advocacy salience	0.346** (0.173)	0.421* (0.239)	0.162 (0.227)	-0.205 (0.309)
Policy domain	-0.260 (0.194)	-0.254 (0.195)	-0.261 (0.192)	-0.248 (0.177)
Complexity+	-0.075 (0.093)	-0.084 (0.096)	-0.080 (0.093)	-0.024 (0.088)
<i>Interaction effects</i>				
Analytical capacities * Advocacy salience		-0.046 (0.102)		
Political capacities * Advocacy salience			0.132 (0.106)	
Policy insider * Advocacy salience				0.282* (0.136)
Constant	2.404*** (0.907)	2.442*** (0.913)	2.531*** (0.907)	2.162** (0.851)
Observations	95	95	95	95
Log Likelihood	-56.128	-56.027	-55.368	-54.193
Akaike Inf. Crit.	138.256	140.055	138.735	136.385
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	171.457	175.809	174.490	172.140

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

+ New variables not included in the main models

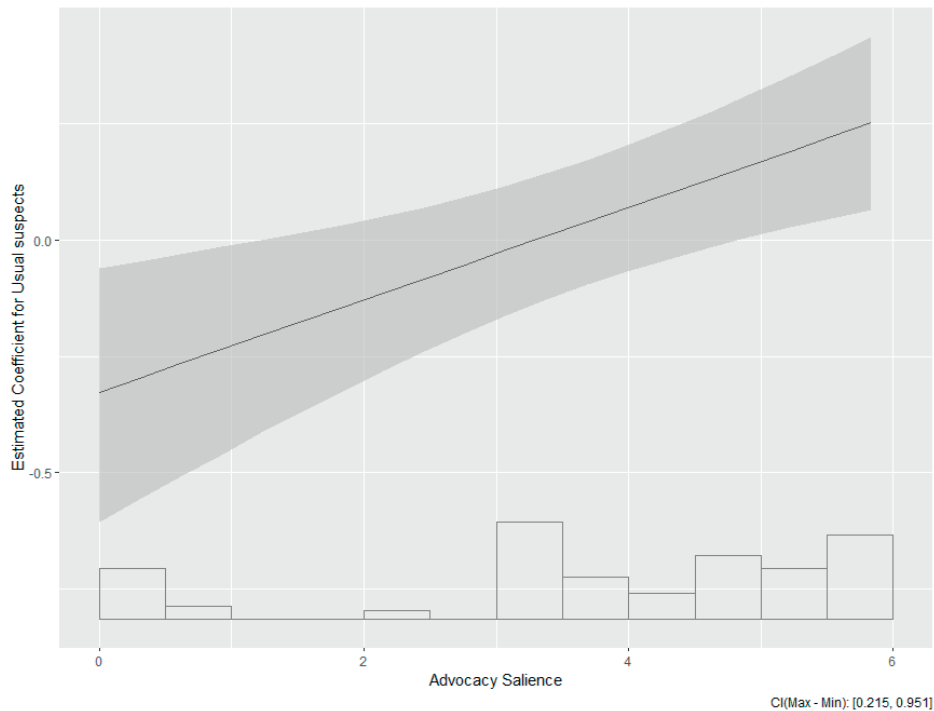
Table A5. Ordinal regression models

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Analytical capacities	2.392*** (0.689)	2.341*** (0.800)	2.430*** (0.683)	2.201*** (0.660)
Political capacities	1.286** (0.628)	1.275** (0.629)	0.721 (0.702)	1.265** (0.599)
Policy insider	-1.053 (0.772)	-1.062 (0.772)	-1.334* (0.779)	-2.189** (1.015)
<i>Controls</i>				
Group type	0.811 (0.974)	0.803 (0.972)	0.497 (0.992)	0.950 (0.929)
Membership group	-1.029 (1.151)	-1.020 (1.152)	-0.532 (1.189)	-0.739 (1.142)
Advocacy salience	2.976* (1.759)	2.800 (2.264)	0.931 (1.977)	-1.268 (2.677)
Policy domain	-2.950 (1.951)	-2.933 (1.941)	-3.013** (1.512)	-2.893* (1.760)
<i>Interaction effects</i>				
Analytical capacities * Advocacy salience		0.097 (0.799)		
Political capacities * Advocacy salience			1.574 (1.021)	
Policy insider * Advocacy salience				2.143* (1.197)
<i>N</i> observations	103	103	103	103
<i>N</i> issues	28	28	28	28
Log Likelihood	-59.56	-59.56	-58.30	-57.97
Akaike Inf. Crit.	139.13	141.11	138.61	137.94
<i>Note:</i>			* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01	

Table A6. Multilevel OLS regression with alternative operationalization of the explanatory factors

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Analytical capacities (alt.)	0.290 ^{***} (0.059)	0.332 ^{***} (0.080)	0.303 ^{***} (0.057)	0.272 ^{***} (0.059)
Political capacities (alt.)	0.146 [*] (0.083)	0.142 [*] (0.083)	-0.089 (0.114)	0.140 [*] (0.080)
Policy insider (alt.)	-0.038 (0.094)	-0.015 (0.098)	-0.117 (0.094)	-0.336 ^{**} (0.145)
<i>Controls</i>				
Group type	0.127 (0.106)	0.127 (0.105)	0.054 (0.105)	0.162 (0.105)
Membership group	-0.051 (0.122)	-0.071 (0.124)	0.061 (0.124)	-0.042 (0.121)
Advocacy salience	0.327 [*] (0.190)	0.415 [*] (0.223)	0.026 (0.210)	-0.200 (0.268)
Policy domain	-0.318 (0.211)	-0.302 (0.214)	-0.335 [*] (0.202)	-0.285 (0.193)
<i>Interaction effects</i>				
Analytical capacities (alt.) * Advocacy salience		-0.086 (0.112)		
Political capacities (alt.) * Advocacy salience			0.435 ^{***} (0.151)	
Policy insider (alt.) * Advocacy salience				0.451 ^{**} (0.177)
Constant	1.836 ^{***} (0.220)	1.776 ^{***} (0.233)	2.022 ^{***} (0.221)	2.187 ^{***} (0.244)
Observations	103	103	103	103
Log Likelihood	-65.504	-65.217	-61.491	-62.493
Akaike Inf. Crit.	151.009	152.434	144.981	146.986
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	177.356	181.416	173.963	175.968
<i>Note:</i>			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Figure A1. Interaction effect between Policy insider and Advocacy salience treated as a continuous variable (logged)



Notes

45 $CTTR = \frac{\text{Number of unique words}}{\sqrt{2 \times \text{Total number words}}}$

46 Due to their conceptual similarity, we also operationalized 'policy insider' with the items "For being a familiar partner" and "For being a regular partner". Importantly, all the results hold with this alternative operationalization.

VIII

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ENGLISH SUMMARY

Interest groups are crucial political actors in western democracies due to their ubiquitous presence and participation in the process of formulating, adopting and implementing public policies. One key aspect of the normative value of interest groups in public policy processes is their ability to provide relevant policy input that is representative of their membership-base. In that regard, interest groups are frequently characterized as transmission belts that connect their members with policymakers. In fact, public officials in charge of developing and implementing legislations often interact and listen to interest groups' spokespersons because they assume that their message is representative of the whole membership-base. However, interest groups struggle to reconcile their dual function of representing their members while being politically active. Consequently, the intermediary function that interest groups play is not a straightforward endeavor, yet it has important normative implications as it signals whether those claiming to act on behalf of members in public policy processes are in fact representing their constituents.

In this dissertation I claim that we need to better understand the intermediary role of interest groups and, to do so, we need to unpack how they are internally organized. More specifically, I ask the following research questions: (1) How and when do interest groups organize themselves as transmission belts? and (2) How does the transmissive role and interest groups' policy capacities affect their political relevance? By addressing these two broad questions, I examine the reasons why certain interest groups are more likely to organize and function as transmission belts and, at the same time, the consequences of interest groups' organizational structure and policy capacities for their political relevance (i.e., their level of access to public officials and influence in legislative processes). Ultimately, the dissertation provides new insights to the intermediary function of interest groups by paying attention to their organizational ability to function as a transmission belt.

Empirically, the dissertation relies on two datasets linked to two large projects: '2-Capture – The Driving Forces of Regulatory Capture' and 'INTEREURO: Networks, Strategies and Influence in the EU'. Both datasets provide valuable quantitative and qualitative data to explore questions of interest groups' internal organizational structure, their ability to function as transmission belts, and the effects of different organizational formats on the political relevance of groups among public officials. Importantly, both projects and the databases related to them focus on interest groups mobilized at the EU level.

In order to address the two-fold overarching research question, this dissertation is structured in two blocks, each of them containing two empirical chapters. The first block examines "How and when interest groups organize themselves as transmission belts". More specifically, Chapter 2 conceptualizes and empirically examines the occurrence of transmission belts among the EU interest groups system. More specifically, transmission belts are conceptualized as those interest groups that invest in organizational attributes related

to ‘member involvement’ for representation and ‘organizational capacity’ to efficiently interact with policymakers. The results of a cluster analysis show that approximately 33% of the EU groups are organizationally equipped to function as transmission belts. In that regard, the majority of the groups only invest in one of the organizational dimensions related to the transmission belt ideal (i.e., member involvement or organizational capacity). Additionally, the chapter finds a positive relationship between groups having a homogenous membership base and being organized as a transmission belt. That is, when the members of the group are more similar among themselves, it is more likely that the group can become organized as a transmission belt by investing in member involvement and organizational capacity.

Chapter 3 takes a step back and focuses on one specific organizational dimensions of the transmission belt which critically determines the representative function and the legitimacy claims of interest groups: member involvement. More specifically, by relying on 32 in-depth interviews with top representatives of interest groups mobilized at the EU level, the chapter examines how and under which circumstances interest groups involve and engage their members when establishing policy positions. The results indicate that unequal resources among the membership-base of umbrella groups as well as issue features shape member involvement in different ways, hence affecting the representative potential of groups. Building upon the results of Chapter 2, the qualitative data also shows that membership diversity, in terms of resources, critically affects *which* members are actually involved in the process of establishing policy positions. In addition, policy issues that generate internal conflict are characterized for having more involvement of members, whereas particularistic policy issues (i.e., those that only affect a subset of the members and thus are characterized by less internal conflict), only attract the attention of those members with a stake on the issue.

The second block of the dissertation examines “How the transmissive role and policy capacities of interest groups affect their political relevance”. In other words, chapters four and five address the implications of interest groups’ organizational structure and policy capacities for their degree of access among public officials and their perceived influence on policymaking processes. Firstly, following an exchange-based approach, Chapter 4 examines the effects that the two organizational dimensions that serve to conceptualize the transmission belt ideal (i.e., member involvement for representation and organizational capacity to efficiently interact with policymakers) have on the level of access that interest groups gain to EU public officials. The results of the regression models indicate that groups that invest in organizational capacity have more access to public officials, whereas groups that invest in member involvement and those that are organizationally prepared to function as transmission belts do not have a higher likelihood of gaining more access to EU public officials.

Chapter 5 argues that political and analytical capacities are demanded by policymakers when developing policy issues and thus affects the level of influence interest groups have on policy issues. The exchange approach perspective is complemented with a behavioral approach and it is argued that public officials' heuristics and routines affect the perceived influence of interest groups. The chapter shows that political and analytical capacities matter for becoming influential on policy issues' outputs. Yet, it also demonstrates that behavioral routines play an important role as they make those groups that are considered policy insiders (i.e., familiar and regular partners) more influential when the degree of advocacy salience is high (i.e., when many stakeholders mobilize in the issue under discussion). That is, public officials rely more on heuristics and shortcuts when dealing with highly salient issues, which may hamper the democratic output of the legislation as relevant alternative views, perspectives and voices might not be taken into account.

What are the key findings of the dissertation? In the first block I find that interest groups have varying organizational formats and implement different processes to involve their members in policy issues. More specifically, only a minority of the groups mobilized at the EU level are organizationally prepared to function as transmission belts, and those who operate as such tend to have homogenous a membership-base, implying that these groups are rather specific and niche-oriented. Moreover, qualitative data indicates that the functioning of the transmission belt is issue-contingent, that is, it depends on how the policy issue under debate (un)equally affects the members of the group. This brings us to the second block of the dissertation aimed at assessing how the organizational structure of groups and their possession of certain policy capacities affects their political relevance. On the one hand, when focusing on access, we observe that public officials prioritize the interaction with professionalized organizations that are able to efficiently respond to public officials' demands and/or provide policy expertise, which can be normatively problematic as we cannot know whether these groups are actually representative of their membership-base. On the other hand, the last empirical chapter, which focuses on influence as outcome variable, shows that the capacity to provide political support and legitimacy (i.e., political capacities) as well as the ability to gather and offer policy expertise and technical knowledge (i.e., analytical capacities) matter for interest groups' perceived influence among EU public officials. In other words, the two capacities linked to the transmission belt dimensions matter for the level of influence groups achieve in legislative processes.

All in all, the four chapters of the dissertation underline the empirical as well as normative relevance of unpacking interest groups as this has a direct effect on their ability to function as intermediary actors and affects their political relevance in public policy processes. Ultimately, this dissertation provides new insights to a long-lasting question in the public policy field, namely: how do we know that those claiming to act on behalf of members in the pressure system are in fact representing their interests?

DUTCH SUMMARY

Belangenorganisaties zijn in westerse democratieën essentiële politieke actoren vanwege hun alomtegenwoordigheid en deelname aan het proces tot de vorming, vaststelling en uitvoering van overheidsbeleid. Eén belangrijk aspect van de normatieve waarde van belangenorganisaties in publieke beleidsprocessen is hun vermogen relevante beleidsinput aan te leveren die representatief is voor hun ledenbestand. Belangenorganisaties worden in dat opzicht vaak gekenmerkt als doorgeefluiken die een verbinding vormen tussen hun leden en beleidsmakers. Overheidsfunctionarissen die belast zijn met de ontwikkeling en uitvoering van wetgeving en beleid onderhouden vaak contact met vertegenwoordigers van belangenorganisaties en luisteren naar hen omdat ze ervan uitgaan dat hun boodschap representatief is voor het hele ledenbestand. Belangenorganisaties worstelen echter met hun tweeledige functie, die bestaat uit het vertegenwoordigen van hun leden en politieke activiteiten. De bemiddelende rol die belangenorganisaties vervullen is daardoor een ingewikkelde zaak dat brengt belangrijke normatieve implicaties met zich mee: zijn de belangen van de leden vertegenwoordigd in beleidsprocessen?

In dit proefschrift stel ik dat we een beter inzicht in de bemiddelende rol van belangenorganisaties moeten zien te krijgen. Om dat te bewerkstelligen is een analyse van de interne organisaties van belangenorganisaties nodig. Meer specifiek stel ik de volgende onderzoeksvragen: (1) Hoe en wanneer organiseren belangenorganisaties zich als doorgeefluik? en (2) Hoe beïnvloeden de rol als doorgeefluik en de beleidscapaciteiten van belangenorganisaties hun politieke relevantie?

Aan de hand van deze twee brede vragen onderzoek ik hoe het komt dat bepaalde belangenorganisaties eerder als doorgeefluik fungeren dan andere en tegelijkertijd welke gevolgen de organisatiestructuur en beleidscapaciteiten van belangenorganisaties hebben voor hun politieke relevantie (d.w.z. de mate waarin ze toegang hebben tot overheidsfunctionarissen en invloed hebben op wetgevingsprocessen). Door stil te staan bij het organisatorische vermogen van belangenorganisaties om als doorgeefluik te fungeren biedt het proefschrift uiteindelijk nieuwe inzichten in hun bemiddelende rol.

Empirisch steunt het proefschrift op twee datasets die zijn gekoppeld aan twee grote projecten: '2-Capture – The Driving Forces of Regulatory Capture' en 'INTEREURO: Networks, Strategies and Influence in the EU'. Beide datasets bieden waardevolle kwantitatieve en kwalitatieve gegevens voor een verkenning van vraagstukken rond de interne organisatiestructuur van belangenorganisaties, hun vermogen om als doorgeefluik te fungeren en het effect van verschillende organisatievormen op de politieke relevantie van belangenorganisaties voor overheidsfunctionarissen. Beide projecten en de daaraan gerelateerde databases gericht zijn op belangenorganisaties die zich op EU-niveau mobiliseren.

Om de tweevoudige overkoepelende onderzoeksvraag te kunnen beantwoorden is dit proefschrift opgebouwd uit twee blokken, die ieder twee empirische hoofdstukken

bevatten. In het eerste blok wordt onderzocht hoe en wanneer belangenorganisaties zich als doorgeefluik organiseren. In hoofdstuk 2 wordt de aanwezigheid van doorgeefluiken in het belangenorganisatiesysteem van de EU geconceptualiseerd en empirisch onderzocht. Doorgeefluiken worden geconceptualiseerd als belangengroepen die investeren in organisatorische kenmerken/eigenschappen met betrekking tot 'ledenbetrokkenheid' ten behoeve van representatie en 'organisatorisch vermogen' om op doeltreffende wijze contact te onderhouden met beleidmakers. Uit de resultaten van een clusteranalyse blijkt dat ongeveer 33% van de belangenorganisaties op EU-niveau organisatorisch zijn toegerust om als doorgeefluik te fungeren. In dat opzicht investeert het merendeel van de belangenorganisaties slechts in één van de organisatorische dimensies met betrekking tot het ideaal voor doorgeefluiken (d.w.z. ledenbetrokkenheid of organisatorisch vermogen). Daarnaast wordt in dit hoofdstuk een positief verband gelegd tussen het hebben van een homogeen ledenbestand en het georganiseerd zijn als doorgeefluik. Dat wil zeggen, wanneer de leden van de belangenorganisatie gelijkvormiger zijn, is het waarschijnlijker dat de organisatie zich als doorgeefluik kan organiseren door te investeren in ledenbetrokkenheid en organisatorisch vermogen.

In hoofdstuk 3 wordt één specifieke organisatorische dimensie van het doorgeefluik onderzocht die in belangrijke mate bepalend is voor de representatieve functie en de legitimiteitsclaims van belangenorganisaties: ledenbetrokkenheid. Meer specifiek: op basis van 32 diepgaande interviews met hoge vertegenwoordigers van belangenorganisaties die op EU-niveau actief zijn, wordt in dit hoofdstuk onderzocht hoe en onder welke omstandigheden belangenorganisaties hun leden betrekken bij de bepaling van beleidsstandpunten. De resultaten duiden erop dat ongelijke middelen in het ledenbestand van koepelorganisaties en de kenmerken van kwesties op verschillende manieren bepalend zijn voor de ledenbetrokkenheid en dus van invloed zijn op het representatieve potentieel van belangenorganisaties. Voortbouwend op de resultaten van hoofdstuk 2 blijkt uit de kwalitatieve gegevens tevens dat de diversiteit van het ledenbestand, in termen van middelen, in belangrijke mate bepaalt *welke* leden daadwerkelijk betrokken zijn bij het proces waarin beleidsstandpunten worden vastgesteld. Daarnaast worden beleidskwesties die intern conflict genereren gekenmerkt door meer betrokkenheid van leden, terwijl particularistische beleidskwesties (d.w.z. kwesties die alleen van invloed zijn op een subset van de leden en dus gekenmerkt worden door minder intern conflict) alleen de aandacht trekken van leden die een belang hebben bij de kwestie.

In het tweede blok van het proefschrift wordt onderzocht hoe de rol als doorgeefluik en de beleids capaciteiten van belangenorganisaties hun politieke relevantie beïnvloeden. Met andere woorden: in hoofdstuk 4 en 5 wordt gekeken naar de implicaties van de organisatorische structuur en beleids capaciteiten van belangenorganisaties voor de mate waarin ze toegang hebben tot overheidsfunctionarissen en hun gepercipieerde invloed op beleidsvormingsprocessen. Ten eerste wordt in hoofdstuk 4 aan de hand van een op

uitwisseling gebaseerde benadering onderzocht wat het effect is van de twee organisatorische dimensies waarmee het ideaal voor doorgeefluiken wordt geconceptualiseerd (d.w.z. ledenbetrokkenheid ten behoeve van representatie en organisatorisch vermogen om op doeltreffende wijze contact te onderhouden met beleidsmakers) op de mate van toegang die belangenorganisaties krijgen tot EU-functionarissen. De resultaten van de regressiemodellen wijzen erop dat belangenorganisaties die investeren in organisatorische capaciteit meer toegang hebben tot overheidsfunctionarissen, terwijl belangenorganisaties die investeren in ledenbetrokkenheid en organisaties die er organisatorisch op voorbereid zijn als doorgeefluik te fungeren niet meer kans maken om meer toegang tot EU-functionarissen te krijgen.

In hoofdstuk 5 wordt gesteld dat beleidsmakers politieke en analytische capaciteiten verlangen bij de ontwikkeling van beleidskwesties en dat deze capaciteiten dus van invloed zijn op de mate van invloed die belangenorganisaties hebben op beleidskwesties. De op uitwisseling gebaseerde benadering wordt aangevuld met een behaviorale benadering en er wordt gesteld dat de heuristieken en gewoontes van overheidsfunctionarissen een effect hebben op de gepercipieerde invloed van belangenorganisaties. In dit hoofdstuk wordt beschreven dat politieke en analytische capaciteiten van belang zijn als het gaat om het verkrijgen van invloed op de output van beleidskwesties. Het blijkt dat ook gewoontes een belangrijke rol spelen. Belangenorganisaties die als beleidsinsiders worden gezien (d.w.z. vertrouwde en vaste partners) meer invloed krijgen wanneer de belangenbehartiging in hoge mate zichtbaar is (d.w.z. wanneer diverse belanghebbenden zich mobiliseren in het kader van de kwestie die aan de orde is). Dat wil zeggen: overheidsfunctionarissen leunen meer op heuristieken en sluiproutes wanneer het gaat om zeer saillante of gevoelige kwesties. Dit heeft gevolgen voor de democratische output, bijvoorbeeld doordat in wetgevingsprocessen relevante, maar alternatieve standpunten, perspectieven en geluiden minder worden meegenomen.

Wat zijn de belangrijkste bevindingen van het proefschrift? In het eerste blok stel ik vast dat belangenorganisaties uiteenlopende organisatorische vormen kennen en gebruik maken van verschillende processen om hun leden bij beleidskwesties te betrekken. Meer specifiek: slechts een klein deel van de belangenorganisaties die zich op EU-niveau mobiliseren zijn er organisatorisch op voorbereid om als doorgeefluik te fungeren en de belangenorganisaties die als zodanig opereren hebben doorgaans een homogeen ledenbestand, wat erop wijst dat deze organisaties vrij specifiek en niche-geörienteerd zijn. Bovendien wijzen kwalitatieve gegevens erop dat het functioneren van het doorgeefluik afhankelijk is van de kwestie; met andere woorden, het hangt af van de wijze waarop de desbetreffende beleidskwestie in (on)gelijke mate van invloed is op de leden van de belangenorganisatie. Dit brengt ons bij het tweede blok van het proefschrift, waarin wordt onderzocht hoe de organisatorische structuur van belangenorganisaties en de mate waarin ze beschikken over bepaalde beleidscapaciteiten van invloed is op hun politieke relevantie. Enerzijds, wanneer

we ons richten op toegang, zien we dat overheidsfunctionarissen prioriteit geven aan de interactie met geprofessionaliseerde organisaties die in staat zijn op doeltreffende wijze in te spelen op de behoeften van de overheidsfunctionarissen en/of beschikken over beleids-expertise, wat normatief gezien problematisch kan zijn, aangezien we niet kunnen weten of deze organisaties daadwerkelijk representatief zijn voor hun ledenbestand. Anderzijds blijkt uit het laatste empirische hoofdstuk, dat gericht is op invloed als uitkomstvariabele, dat de capaciteit om politieke steun en legitimiteit te bieden (d.w.z. politieke capaciteiten) alsook het vermogen om beleidsexpertise en technische kennis te bieden (d.w.z. analytische capaciteiten) van belang zijn als het gaat om de gepercipieerde invloed van belangenorganisaties onder EU-functionarissen. Met andere woorden: de twee capaciteiten die gekoppeld zijn aan de dimensies van het doorgeefluik zijn van belang voor de mate waarin belangenorganisaties invloed in wetgevingsprocessen krijgen.

Alles bij elkaar onderstrepen de vier hoofdstukken van het proefschrift de empirische alsook de normatieve relevantie van een analyse van belangenorganisaties, aangezien een en ander rechtstreeks van invloed is op hun vermogen om als bemiddelende actoren te fungeren en een effect heeft op hun politieke relevantie in publieke beleidsprocessen. Uiteindelijk biedt dit proefschrift nieuw inzichten in een belangrijke vraag in het beleidsveld, namelijk: hoe weten we dat degenen die beweren in het belangengroep systeem namens hun leden te handelen, hun belangen daadwerkelijk vertegenwoordigen?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Between 2010 and 2016, Albareda worked as a researcher in public, private, and non-profit organizations such as the South Korean embassy in Spain and the think tank in international affairs CIDOB (Barcelona Center for International Affairs). Since 2012, Albareda has been involved in national and international research projects lead by the Center for Public Governance of ESADE Business School. Additionally, he has experience conducting applied research as a consultant. More specifically, he has participated in projects funded by the Catalan government and the city council of Barcelona.

In 2016, Albareda started as a PhD Candidate at the institute of Public Administration of Leiden University (Campus The Hague). His research project was embedded within a larger project led by prof. dr. Caelesta Braun aimed at exploring the driving forces of regulatory capture. The focus of the PhD was on the role of interest groups in democratic systems, the extent to which they function as intermediary organizations that connect members with policymaking process and the political consequences thereof. His research has been published in various international, peer-reviewed academic journals in the areas of political sciences and public administration.

Next to his PhD position, Albareda has organized workshops and seminars for both scholar and practitioners involved in the field of lobbying and interest groups. Albareda is actively engaged with the community of scholars in the low countries conducting research in the field of lobbying, interest groups, and civil society organizations. He has also participated as a guest in executive education programs for senior civil servants from Spain and Latin America. Moreover, he is still involved in several research projects conducted by the Center of Public Governance of ESADE Business School.

As of September 2020, Albareda works as assistant professor in public policy and politics at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology of Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Interest groups are often described as transmission belts that connect the preferences of their members with public officials in policymaking processes. Through this linkage, public officials can obtain relevant information and gain legitimacy from those affected by public policies. However, this important intermediary function is not a straightforward endeavor as interest groups often struggle to reconcile their dual function of representing their members while being politically active. This dissertation unpacks interest groups mobilized at the European Union level and examines how they are organized so as to function as transmission belts. Subsequently, it analyzes the effects of this transmissive role for the level of access and influence obtained by groups in policymaking processes. The findings shed light on the difficult task of groups in balancing member involvement while being politically active and the implications for the legitimacy of our governance systems.

